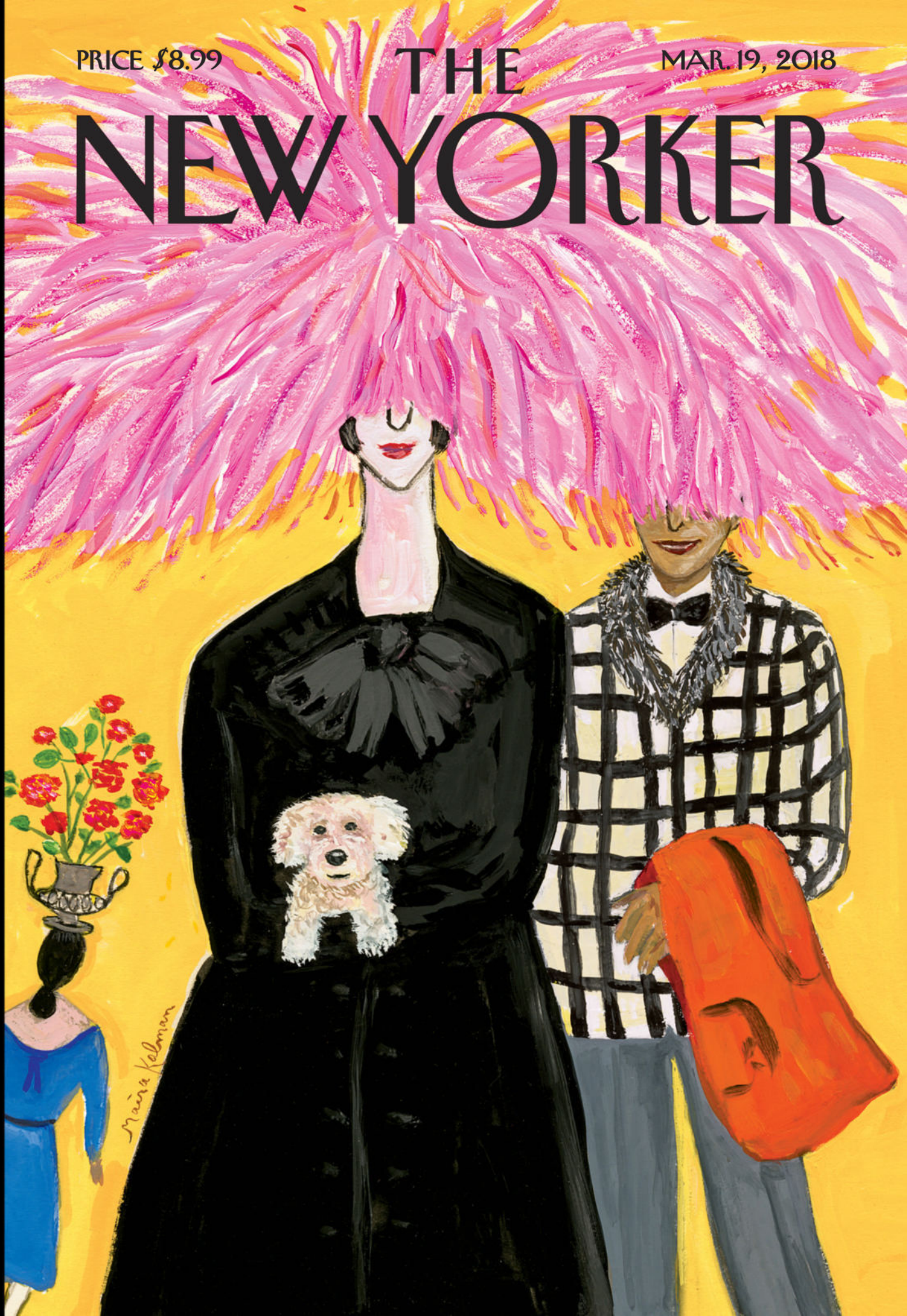


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MARCH 19, 2018

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DOLCE & GABBANA

#DG VENEZIA

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PHOTO BOOTH

Rachel Syme writes about Dario Calmese's portraits of the Harlem fashion celebrity Lana Turner.



PODCAST

Robin Wright on how Putin is working with Iran to undermine American influence in the Middle East.



DAILY SHOUTS

Walter Scott illustrates the struggle to pursue a master's degree in art.

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THE ALT-RIGHT AGENDA

The exchange between the controversial psychologist Jordan Peterson and an interviewer, reported in Kelefa Sanneh's article on Peterson's book, "12 Rules for Life," reflects a common misunderstanding about human rights (Books, March 5th). When the interviewer asked Peterson what gave him the right to offend transgender people about their self-referential pronoun choices, Peterson asked what right she (and, we can infer, transgender people) had to offend him. This retort apparently stumped the interviewer, prompting Peterson to exclaim, "Ha! Gotcha."

The answer to Peterson's question is straightforward. Human rights represent claims that the less powerful make against those who have power. Transgender people have traditionally been at the mercy of privileged people like Peterson. While pronoun choices may not be an explicitly recognized human right, they represent respect for larger rights that are legitimately claimed, even at the risk of discomfiting the powerful. A slaveholder might have been offended by a slave's demand for freedom (and to be called by a respectful title), but that in no way vitiates the legitimacy of the claim. Ha! Gotcha.

William F. Schulz
Carr Center for Human Rights Policy
Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
Gloucester, Mass.

At one of Jordan Peterson's Bible lectures in Toronto last summer, I eavesdropped on a group of intense young men. "I used to read *The New Yorker*," one said, "until I realized it was just propaganda." In the light of that assumption, I am grateful to Sanneh for his thoughtful and fair critique of Peterson's work. A snide hit piece would have been easy to write; it also would have hardened the hearts and confirmed the prejudices of his admirers—and his detractors. The people who follow

Peterson's work feel that he offers them a way out of nihilism, that he has taught them how to live uprightly and look for the good they can do in their everyday lives. That Sanneh's article acknowledges this is heartening.

Laura Freeburn
Burlington, Wisc.

Peterson's directives to his students and to the online community have encouraged much more violence than Sanneh's article suggests. In an interview with Camille Paglia, Peterson complained that men weren't allowed to resolve conflicts with women with physical responses or threats, and he has supported the development of Web search engines to find courses with feminist and anti-racist content in order to better target professors. This isn't folksy eccentricity; it is white supremacy and misogyny. As a professor of women's studies at the University of Toronto and a colleague of Peterson's, threats against me, my colleagues, and my students deprive me of the opportunity to delight in Peterson quite as much as Sanneh does.

Peterson sees the well-being of (white) men and (white) boys as deeply threatened by feminism and anti-racism. We desperately need psychologists who think deeply about the health of men and boys—and who don't think they have to colonize other cultures and subjugate women to know themselves and achieve wisdom and happiness. Sanneh might find the *Unabomber* papers rich with nuggets of wisdom for his personal tool kit, and, while we're at it, did David Duke write any good children's books?

Judith Taylor
Women and Gender Studies Institute
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ont.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

Mike Spies's article about Marion Hammer's role in putting guns of any type in the hands of just about any-

one for any purpose whatsoever reflects as much on the failures of our legislative process as it does on our callous disrespect for life ("The Arms Dealer," March 5th). Our democratic system allows lobbyists to advocate for causes that are completely irresponsible, capricious, or even life-threatening. The courts have ruled in favor of fewer limits on political spending, thus expanding pressures on Congress to bend to well-financed corporate will. Nonetheless, the blame for permitting access to mass-murder weapons does not rest with lobbyists like Hammer, but with the legislature. Hammer's description of how she believes a gun protected her during an encounter with three suspected thugs in a garage is offered as a justification for the nationwide sale and proliferation of lethal weapons of all sorts.

Nelson Goodman
Delray Beach, Fla.

DONALD AND DONALD

As Tad Friend's Profile of the actor, writer, comedian, musician, and producer Donald Glover made clear, we live in the age of the two Donalds ("Donald Glover Can't Save You," March 5th). One is white, one black; both are brilliant showmen and raconteurs; both are certainly geniuses in their own minds, but probably to the rest of us, too (if not in fact, then in effect). Viewed in isolation by an inquiring visitor from the future, the life story of either of these men might not make much sense. But, taken together, their stories explain much about our current age of unrest, and possibly also our way forward.

Kent Taucer
Eugene, Ore.

•
Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Three decades ago, a crew of hair stylists, led by David Humphries, began flaunting their most fantastic designs at night clubs around Detroit. “**Hair Wars**”—equal parts performance art and promotion—is still going strong; it arrives at MOMA PS1 on March 18. Among the participants is Joanne Petit-Frère (modelling her own creation, above). Her portrait was taken by Kwame Brathwaite, whose Afrocentric vision helped to pioneer the “Black Is Beautiful” movement, in the nineteen-sixties.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KWAME BRATHWAITE

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Patrice Chéreau's production of Strauss's "**Elektra**" has the spirit of an ancient Greek tragedy but the look of a modern one: it turns the house of Agamemnon into a dysfunctional family, à la Eugene O'Neill, which endures its own long day's journey into night in the course of the hundred-minute opera. The lacerating score is a map of Elektra's psychological landscape; the dramatic soprano Christine Goerke and the conductor, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, work hand in hand to chart her path through rage, anxiety, vengefulness, and exultance. A stellar supporting cast—Elza van den Heever, Michaela Schuster, and Mikhail Petrenko—adds depth to the drama. *March 17 at 1.* • **Also playing:** In Rossini's rarely performed "**Semiramide**," a bass, a tenor, and a mezzo-soprano (in a trouser role) compete in a three-way race for the heart of an ingénue and the throne of the ancient Assyrian empire: a transparent setup for a string of arias and ensembles in which a supremely talented cast of bel-canto singers—Ildar Abdrazakov, Javier Camarena, and Elizabeth DeShong—compete in feats of vocal derring-do. The impressive Angela Meade takes the title role; Maurizio Benini. (These are the final performances.) *March 14 at 7:30 and March 17 at 8.* • Since 1996, Mozart's "**Così Fan Tutte**" has been presented in a light and sunny production that largely ignores the show's complex musings on men, women, power, and society. Now Phelim McDermott (who triumphed at the house with Glass's "Satyagraha") is helming a new staging, which evokes Coney Island in the nineteen-fifties, with a troupe of carnival performers backing a cast that includes Amanda Majeski, Serena Malfi, Ben Bliss, Adam Plachetka, and—as the scheming Don Alfonso and the maid, Despina—Christopher Maltman and Kelli O'Hara. Sung in Italian; David Robertson. *March 15 and March 20 at 7:30.* • Anthony Minghella's vividly cinematic staging of "**Madama Butterfly**," an early high point of Peter Gelb's tenure, still feels clean, fresh, and vital more than a decade later. The revival stars Ermonela Jaho, Luis Chapa, Maria Zifchak, and Roberto Frontali; Marco Armiliato. (This is the final performance.) *March 16 at 8.* (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Beth Morrison Projects: "Next Generation"

The new-music enterprise, which also organizes the highly influential Prototype Festival, has an impressive track record of promoting bold and edgy composers, including David T. Little, Missy Mazzoli, and Nico Muhly. Now it's turning its attention to music by a new crop of talents: ten young composers, whose work will be presented in a showcase format. *March 17 at 7.* (National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)

Guggenheim Museum "Works & Process" Series: "An American Soldier"

The composer Huang Ruo and the playwright David Henry Hwang ("M. Butterfly") introduce excerpts from their new opera about Danny Chen and the vicious hazing he endured as a Chinese-American at the hands of fellow-soldiers at a military base in Afghanistan; the piece will be premiered in June by Opera Theatre of St. Louis. *March 18 at 7:30.* (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Meredith Monk: "Cellular Songs"

An industrious, indefatigable, and inimitable composer, vocalist, and choreographer, Monk focusses on the basic stuff of life on Earth in her newest evening-length work, in which she envisions biological processes as models for harmonious human interactions. Monk's ensemble here comprises a close-knit group of women collaborators—including a newcomer, Jo Stewart, in her company debut—alongside ten members of the Young People's Chorus of New York City. *March 14-17 at 7:30 and March 18 at 3.* (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. bam.org.)

Academy of St. Martin in the Fields

The Academy will always be closely associated with its founder, the late Neville Marriner, but Joshua Bell, the violin virtuoso, has brought his distinctive swagger to the institution for several years. He'll be out front in Wieniawski's Violin Concerto No. 2 for the group's upcoming concert at David Geffen Hall, and leading music by Mendelssohn and Beethoven (the Symphony No. 6, "Pastoral") from the concertmaster's chair. *March 19 at 8.* (212-721-6500.)

RECITALS

Alvin Curran

Curran, one of the great enduring figures of the glory days of what was once called "electronic music," is still in fine form. The sound artist appears at the beautifully restored Veterans Room of the Park Avenue Armory this week, to present "The Alvin Curran Fake Book," a compendium that includes pieces like "Shofar Shoals," in which sounds from that most ancient of instruments get a dazzling, computerized revamp. *March 14 at 7 and 9.* (Park Ave. at 66th St. armoryonpark.org.)

Angela Hewitt: "Bach Odyssey"

The doyenne of Canadian pianists, an elegant and knowing interpreter of Bach, rounds out the second year of a four-season journey through the Master's music, at the 92nd Street Y. On Wednesday, she performs the "Well-Tempered Clavier," Book I; on Sunday, the Goldberg Variations. *March 14 at 7:30 and March 18 at 3.* (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

"The Crypt Sessions": Lara St. John

St. John, always a free spirit, descends (with her pianist, Matt Herskowitz) into the crypt of the Church of the Intercession in Hamilton Heights to offer a raucous program for a quiet space: "Lavuta: Violin Beyond the Pale," in which Eastern European folk melodies (such as "Hava Nagila") get expansive treatments from contemporary composers. *March 14-15 at 8.* (Broadway at W. 155th St. deathofclassical.com.)

Israeli Chamber Project

This fine ensemble, which tours far beyond the borders of its native land, appears in concert at the Baruch Performing Arts Center with a program offering classics by Schumann (the Piano Quintet) and Ravel, along with novelties by Carter, Stravinsky (a chamber version of "Petrushka"), and Gilad Cohen (a world premiere). *March 15 at 7:30.* (Engelman Recital Hall, 55 Lexington Ave. baruch.cuny.edu.)

Spectrum: Debussy Festival

A Debussy celebration at Spectrum, a far-flung Brooklyn bastion of avant-garde sounds, asserts the impact that the pioneering French Impressionist's elegant, enigmatic music had on the modernists who followed in his wake. The ambitious series, marking the centennial of the composer's death, begins with a lecture by its curator, the scholar and archivist Allan Evans, followed by a rendition, by the pianist Robert Dvorkin, of Debussy's seminal "Preludes." *March 16-17 at 7 and March 18 at 3 and 7.* Through March 25. (70 Flushing Ave., Brooklyn. spectrumnyc.com.)

Alarm Will Sound

This reliably audacious new-music ensemble partners with the violist Nadia Sirota, who hosts the Peabody Award-winning music podcast "Meet the Composer," for "This Music Should Not Exist," a multimedia program examining the turbulent life and work of the Hungarian composer György Ligeti. The evening creates a portrait in words, recorded sounds, and live performances, including complete accounts of Ligeti's "Continuum," Chamber Concerto, and thrilling Piano Concerto (with John Orfe as the soloist). *March 16 at 7:30.* (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800.)

Bargemusic

The barge, after a spell of winter maintenance, is back in business. Those looking for a thoughtful way to spend St. Patrick's Day can swing by to hear the violinist Vera Vaidman and the pianist Emanuel Krasovsky perform an all-Irish program that features not only two of John Field's Nocturnes for solo piano—which provided a model for both Chopin and the American master Samuel Barber, partially of Irish heritage—but also works by Charles Villiers Stanford and Howard Ferguson (the Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano). *March 17 at 6.* (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. For tickets and full schedule, visit bargemusic.org.)

World Music Institute: Wu Man

The renowned pi-pa virtuoso, a magnetic player in whatever genre she chooses to explore, is currently on tour with the Huayin Shadow Puppet Band, offering a program rich in music and traditional arts from rural China. *March 17 at 8.* (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. world-musicinstitute.org.)

Brazilian Guitar Quartet

The 92nd Street Y, a distinguished sponsor of all sorts of chamber concerts, has a particular devotion to the art of the guitar recital. This week, the noted South American group marks its twentieth anniversary with a program that features an arrangement of Villa-Lobos's String Quartet No. 12, as well as works by Jobim (a suite of song arrangements) and Ronaldo Miranda. *March 17 at 8.* (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

This year, the Society's Winter Festival centers on a little-known but crucial musical figure of early-nineteenth-century Vienna: the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the first person to form a professional string quartet, who played in the premiere performances of now beloved works by Beethoven and Schubert. The second of four programs—featuring the Miró Quartet, among other musicians—includes a treasured quartet by Haydn (in E-Flat Major, Op. 71, No. 3) and two comparative rarities: Spohr's Double Quartet No. 1 in D Minor and Beethoven's String Quintet in C Major, Op. 29. *March 18 at 5.* (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788.)

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DANCE



New York Theatre Ballet will perform the rare Jerome Robbins piece "Rondo," from 1980, as part of the Harkness Dance Festival, at the 92nd Street Y.

We're Not Stuck Up

New York City Ballet and New York Theatre Ballet stage Robbins festivals.

Why do we celebrate artists' centennials and bicentennials? Partly because, if we didn't, what would we have festivals about? We also use these big birthdays and deathdays to congratulate ourselves—to say that we are the people who produced Verdi and Debussy and Billie Holiday—and, of course, to thank the artists, many of whom had hard lives and died young.

In the hands of an ambitious producer, a festival can also be a chance to reevaluate the artist. In Vienna, in 2006, the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Mozart's birth, Peter Sellars staged the "New Crowned Hope" festival (named after Mozart's Masonic lodge), aimed at showing that the great young man, so soon to die, was also a great democrat, however hard he had to labor for the favor of the aristocracy. On the other hand, producers—and audiences—may just want to see the beloved artist's pieces lined up again, all in a row: joy after joy. In New York City Ballet's "Robbins 100" festival,

which will run for three weeks in May (at the David H. Koch), we won't get a lot of surprises about Jerome Robbins (1918–98), who was George Balanchine's co-ballet master at N.Y.C.B. We will see "Goldberg Variations" and "Dances at a Gathering" and "The Concert" and the other standards. The festival will also contain what are being billed as two world premières, "Something to Dance About," an assemblage of excerpts from Robbins musicals arranged by the Broadway director and choreographer Warren Carlyle, and an actual new piece by Justin Peck, the company's resident choreographer, set to music by Robbins's longtime collaborator Leonard Bernstein, who is also having his hundredth birthday this year. According to the company, this new ballet is "inspired by" Robbins. That is, apparently, it's not Robbins, and it's not not Robbins.

But, for people who would really like to see some unfamiliar work by Robbins, there's another festival on offer: "A Centennial Celebration of Jerome Robbins," by the chamber company New York Theatre Ballet, in three performances, on March 16 and 17, at the 92nd Street Y. This

will include three Robbins works that are almost never seen. One is "Rondo," from 1980, which is set to a short piece by Mozart. Everything in it is simple: just two young women in pink tunics dancing to one piano. Robbins loved to mix ballet steps with simpler moves picked up from folk dance or boogie or whatever. Here the women, after a difficult maneuver, repeatedly do a little toe tap on the floor behind them. It's as if they were saying, "See? We're American. We're not stuck up. We can do these fancy Russian ballet steps and also 'Turkey in the Straw.'"

Diana Byer, New York Theatre Ballet's artistic director, recently remarked on how nice it is to see Robbins without the sets and the costumes, and with only a few dancers. "Just these little teeny jewels!" she exclaimed. They reveal things that are harder to see in the big works—notably, the often muffled intimacy among the performers. The dancers interact companionably but feelingly, as if they had known one another for a long time and didn't have to tell us, maybe couldn't tell us, what it was all about.

—Joan Acocella

ILLUSTRATION BY ELENI KALORKOTI

Paul Taylor American Modern Dance

At eighty-seven, Paul Taylor is the last man standing from his generation of modern-dance greats. He's still making new work, though it must be said that in the past decade he has racked up more misses than hits. This spring, the company introduces his hundred-and-forty-seventh opus, "Concertiana," set to an ebullient string concerto by the American composer Eric Ewazen. But you may be better off catching great works like "Eventide," "Aureole," or the more political "Banquet of Vultures." The company is also performing two new dances created for it by outside choreographers, Doug Varone and Bryan Arias. And it will be sharing the stage with two guests: the Trisha Brown Dance Company, in Brown's "Set and Reset" (an essential artifact of the eighties New York downtown artistic scene), and Sara Mearns, of New York City Ballet, in a medley of early-twentieth-century solos by Isadora Duncan. (*David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. March 14-18 and March 20. Through March 25.*)

Brian Brooks Dance

For the past few years, Brooks's career has received a boost from his collaborations with the former ballet star Wendy Whelan. The Harris Theatre in Chicago selected him as its first choreographer-in-residence, investing some three hundred thousand dollars in supporting him for a period of three years. One result is "Prelude," now having its New York premiere. In it, Brooks, whose formal inventions often get stuck in a groove, experiments with rewinding, trying to reverse momentum and habitual flow. The program also includes his 2015 work "Division," in which dancers deftly arrange surprisingly light sheets of wood. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 14-18.*)

Jody Oberfelder Projects

The chief attraction of "Zaubernacht" is its score. The 1922 work by Kurt Weill, which was forgotten in a Yale University basement for fifty years, is an enchanting, sophisticated wonder. The original scenario involved toys and fairy-tale characters coming to life, but Oberfelder, a choreographer whose previous updates of chamber works have wobbled on the line between charming and too cute, has devised her own child's-eye tale. The Knickerbocker Chamber Orchestra plays the score live. (*Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Pl. 866-811-4111. March 14-15 and March 18.*)

Ailey II

The impressive dancers of Ailey II—who often graduate into the main company—spend much of the year on tour, but for two weeks they'll be performing in the small theatre at the company's headquarters. They present two programs, one made up wholly of new works, the other of dances from last season. The choreography varies in quality, but seeing these strong, generous, charismatic dancers up close is its own reward. (*Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-868-4444. March 14-18. Through March 25.*)

"Dancing Platform Praying Grounds"

This spring's Platform at Danspace Project, curated by Reggie Wilson, focusses on the intersections of dance, race, religion, and architecture. Next up is a shared evening. Keely Garfield Dance presents "Mandala," the intri-

cate, Aquarian finale of her recent dance "Perfect Piranha." The collective Same as Sister fashions a fairy tale about race in "The Exciting Event. . ." And Ni'Ja Whitson offers an excerpt from "Oba Queen Baba King Baba," a queer look at the roles of father and king. It's designed to be watched from above, so viewers are invited to ascend to the church's balcony. (*St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. March 15-17.*)

"From the Horse's Mouth: A Celebration of Egyptian Dance"

This long-running series, which illuminates the lives of dancers with a mix of storytelling and semi-improvisational performance, turns to Egypt. In many ways, the show is a tribute to Magda Saleh, who was a prima ballerina during the Soviet-sponsored efflorescence of ballet in Egypt, in the nineteen-sixties, and was good enough to dance the lead role in "Giselle" with the Bolshoi. But the participants range widely across other forms, from up-to-date avant-garde choreography to traditional stick fighting. More of the rare, older stuff can be found in Saleh's 1977 documentary, "Egypt Dances," which gets an afternoon screening on March 17. (*Theatre at the 14th Street Y, 344 E. 14th St. 212-780-0800. March 15-18.*)

New York Theatre Ballet

Jerome Robbins was the ultimate Renaissance man; he choreographed and directed on Broadway, worked in the movies, and staged ballets alongside George Balanchine at New York City Ballet. At the Harkness Dance Festival, New York Theatre Ballet revives a trio of his lesser-known miniatures, "Septet" and "Concertino," both set to Stravinsky, and "Rondo," set to Mozart's enigmatic Rondo in A Minor. The Stravinsky ballets haven't been seen in more than a decade. (*92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. March 16-17.*)

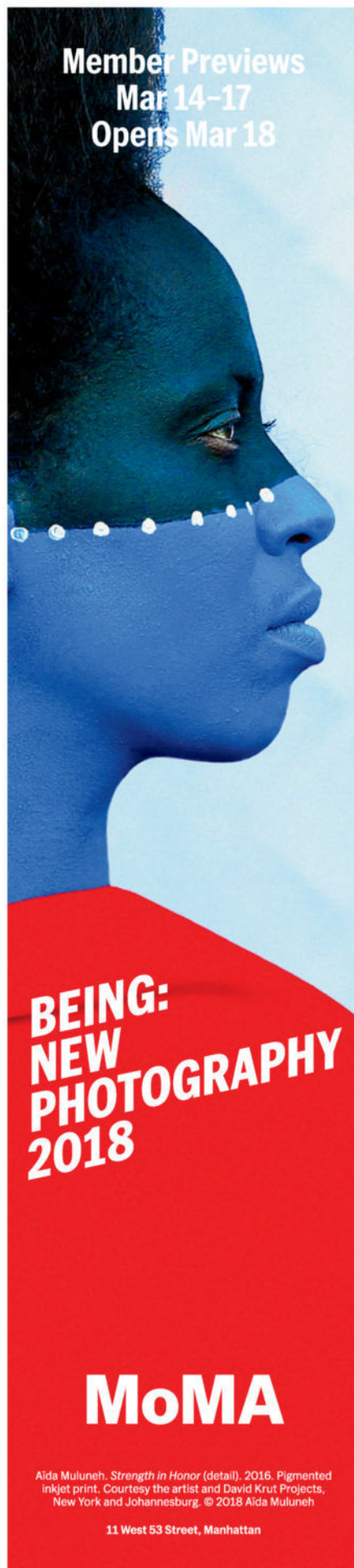
Elisa Monte Dance

This troupe may still bear the name of its founder, but Tiffany Rea-Fisher, who succeeded Monte as artistic director in 2015, is making the company her own. On the first of two nights, she débuts "The Best Self Project," a dance in the form of a motivational talk show. On the second night, she spruces up some of her recent works with guest stars: the Alvin Ailey luminary Clifton Brown, the topnotch tap dancer Ayodele Casel, and even Tony Danza, who sings. (*Aaron Davis Hall, 160 Convent Ave., between W. 133rd and 135th Sts. 212-650-6900. March 16-17.*)

Nick Mauss / "Transmissions"

At the Whitney, the artist Nick Mauss has put together an exhibit that creates visual links and associations between various strands of New York modernism of the thirties and forties. Drawing on the museum's collection, and also that of the Dance Division of the New York Public Library and the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, he connects ballet to the designs of Christian Bérard, the drawings of Paul Cadmus, and the erotically charged dancer portraits of George Platt Lynes. The exhibit has a live dimension as well, with dancers (including Brandon Collwes and Burr Johnson) periodically entering the space and performing balletic interpretations of the works around them. (*Whitney Museum, 99 Gansevoort St. 212-671-1842. March 16-19. Through May 14.*)

Member Previews
Mar 14-17
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MoMA

Aida Muluneh, *Strength in Honor* (detail), 2016. Pigmented inkjet print. Courtesy the artist and David Krut Projects, New York and Johannesburg. © 2018 Aida Muluneh

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NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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The Blow

In the early aughts, Khaela Maricich's electro-pop project bloomed in the fertile soil of Northwestern lo-fi. In 2004, she was joined by Jona Bechtolt, of Yacht fame, who was then replaced by the installation artist Melissa Dyne, in 2007. The Blow's music is tailor-made for late nights in college dorms, a safe space for Maricich to explore personal dialogues on love and art. She remains a savvy performer, and, for all her apparent transparency, she has an ability to lacquer over her soul-searching with deflective sarcasm. (See her recent cover of "The Greatest Love of All.") This week, Maricich and Dyne come to the industrial fringes of Bushwick to perform at this multiroom venue. (*Elsewhere, 599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebrooklyn.com. March 18.*)

Breakbot

A decade ago, French house music infiltrated parties and playlists worldwide—acts like Justice and Daft Punk confirmed that the sound had pop-crossover potential. Soon, big, cinematic synth melodies drawn from early disco and P-Funk, futuristic talk-box samples, and four-on-the-floor drums became the soundtrack to football games and spring breaks. Breakbot, born Thibaut Berland, is a gem of that era who

continues to tap out excellent dance music. The producer and d.j. earned a reputation (and a deal with Ed Banger Records, the French house label du jour) for his imaginative remixes: with a few swelling piano chords, he can make an indie-pop single, such as Metronomy's "A Thing for Me," exponentially more addictive. Berland performs with his old partner **Irfane** on one of Brooklyn's best sound systems for this d.j. set. (*Output, 74 Wythe Ave., Williamsburg. outputclub.com. March 15.*)

James Chance and the Contortions

This legendary short-lived outfit first appeared on Brian Eno's 1978 compilation "No New York," which packaged the city's hippest post-punk bands and christened the No Wave genre. Blending the free-jazz horn theatrics of Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler with wet, muted funk and showman shrieks ("Contort yourself five times!"), Chance and his group put their stamp on a fringe style that felt at once chicly nostalgic and switchblade sharp. Young contemporary bands still aspire to their plucky, smoky tones and rambling structures. Chance and the Contortions return to the city for Jonathan Toubin's beloved all-45 party, "Soul Clap & Dance Off." (*Elsewhere, 599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebrooklyn.com. March 17.*)

Charli XCX

Charli XCX is a product of the mid-aughts MySpace music era, when the social-networking site first became a viable platform for artist discovery, and today the singer continues to collaborate



Before supporting Taylor Swift's "Reputation" stadium tour this spring, Charli XCX headlines *Elsewhere's* big room, performing from "Pop 2," the bubblegum mixtape she released in December.

with some of the best rising talent on the Web. In 2016, she released "Vroom Vroom," an EP produced largely by the pop impresario Sophie. The two worked together again on standout tracks for Charli's follow-up album, "Number 1 Angel," including the single "After the After Party," which features the rapper Lil Yachty, a master of modern social media. Charli has put on a consistent live show for nearly a decade, steadily producing music while maintaining the intrigue of a new artist; she's currently touring her latest mixtape, "Pop 2." (*Elsewhere*, 599 Johnson Ave., Brooklyn. elsewherebrooklyn.com. March 18.)

Four Tet

For his seventh album, "Beautiful Rewind," from 2013, the electronic artist Kieran Hebden, who records and performs as Four Tet, took the concept of self-releasing to new heights, not only ditching his longtime label, Domino, but also snubbing any and all marketing tactics. "No pre order, no youtube trailers, no itunes stream, no spotify, no amazon deal, no charts, no bit coin deal, no last minute rick rubin," the Londoner tweeted. Since then, the laptop wizard has maintained his playful, no-frills style, merging jungle grooves with brainy beats, scuzzy samples, and rhapsodic synths to induce a psychedelic meltdown that begs for the dance floor. He settles in for a weeklong stay at National Sawdust. (80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 646-779-8455. March 19-23.)

Jenny Hval

In 2016, this fascinating Norwegian experimental chanteuse and songwriter released "Blood Bitch," her fourth long-player under her own name. About halfway through, in a snippet from a home recording, a friend asks her what the record is about. "It's about vampires," she laughs. "It's about blood!" Through a sonic collage of ambient noise, spoken word, and transcendent synth pop, Hval investigates her personal relationship with vampirism, femininity, and menstruation. Hval appears at MOMA PS1 for a site-specific performance this week, as part of the "Sunday Sessions" series. (22-25 Jackson Ave., Queens. moma.org. March 17.)

Judas Priest

Even for detractors of eighties metal, the seventeen-minute documentary "Heavy Metal Parking Lot" is easily the most charming bit of ephemera to emerge from the genre. In 1986, two young producers hung around a tailgate party outside a Judas Priest concert in Landover, Maryland, interviewing beer-guzzling superfans and zoned-out heshers about their allegiance to Priest and its singer, the "metal god" Rob Halford. It's by turns a spellbinding ethnographic document and a side-splitting comic masterpiece. (Interested parties should head to YouTube immediately.) Metal fans are just as fervent today as they were during the Reagan Administration; this weekend, they'll congregate once more, in the parking lot outside the old Nassau Coliseum in Long Island, where Judas Priest headlines in support of its upcoming album, "Firepower." (1255 Hempstead Turnpike, Uniondale, N.Y. 516-231-4848. March 17.)

Moby

"As a life long progressive I'm supposed to be diplomatic and understanding," Moby wrote in an open letter, published in *Billboard* shortly after the 2016 election. "But America, what the fuck is wrong with you?" The iconic elec-

tronic producer took the results hard after a year of campaigning for Hillary Clinton. But the trauma might have nudged him creatively; after leaping around genres and projects, Moby has returned to the nimble, escapist trip-hop that made him famous. On his new album, "Everything Was Beautiful and Nothing Hurt," he faces the grief head on, and softens its weight with crispy drum loops and choral trance vocals. His take on the standard "Like a Moth-erless Child" is as effortless as it is excellent. (Rough Trade, 64 N. 9th St., Brooklyn. roughtrade-nyc.com. March 20-21.)

Ty Dolla Sign

As a child, Tyrone Griffin was exposed to soul music's biggest stars; his father, a member of the funk group Lakeside, inspired Griffin's love of songwriting and production. But tastes have changed since Lakeside's 1980 single "Fantastic Voyage"; Ty Dolla Sign's music is tuned to the sweaty clubs and house parties of Los Angeles, and lands on the raunchier end of the spectrum. His biggest hits—"Paranoid," "Or Nah"—are outdone only by his writing and playing for acts like Rihanna and Kanye West. But buried in his catalogue are songs that reveal a more complex artist than the club-hopper he projects. "Free TC," a solo album from 2015, dove more deeply into the lives of his family and friends, but on last year's "Beach House 3" Ty got back to his old tricks. (Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl. 212-777-6800. March 20.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Paquito D'Rivera

The saxophone genius Charlie Parker produced some of the most lyrical playing of his condensed career in his "Bird with Strings" projects of 1949-52, particularly his iconic improvisation on "Just Friends." The Cuban-born saxophone virtuoso D'Rivera will take on this work, as well as some unrecorded scores and material from Parker's collaborations with the Latin-jazz pioneers Chico O'Farrill and Machito. (*Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St.* 212-721-6500. March 16-17.)

Jimmy Greene's Love in Action

The stirring music that this saxophonist produces has never been more immediate—Greene devotes his heartfelt "Beautiful Life" project to the memory of his daughter, a victim of the Sandy Hook massacre. Joining his quintet are the pianist Renee Rosnes and the bassist John Patitucci. (*Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St.* 212-576-2232. March 15-16 and March 18.)

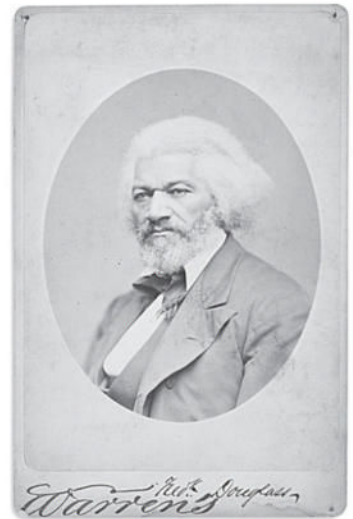
Lena Hall

The highs and lows of theatrical auditions will be explored—hopefully, all in the name of personal catharsis—by this Tony-winning actress and singer, who revisits her own experiences through songs drawn from such Broadway landmarks as "Wicked," "Cats," "Sweeney Todd," "The Phantom of the Opera," and "Rent." (*Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St.* 212-744-1600. March 13-17.)

Roy Haynes

If there's another living jazz musician who can claim to have played with both Lester Young and Pat Metheny, let him come forward. If not, the brilliant drummer Haynes (who can also count associations with Charlie Parker,

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John Coltrane, Sarah Vaughan, and Chick Corea) bears the sole distinction. Celebrating his ninety-third birthday, Haynes will be fêted by special guests throughout this engagement. (*Blue Note*, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. March 15-18.)

Mat Maneri

Hurling his violin and viola into parts unknown—that is, if microtonal music isn't on

your daily playlist—Maneri has become a force to be reckoned with in new jazz since he first emerged, in the nineties, as an integral element of the visionary ensembles he co-led with his father, the saxophonist and educator Joe Maneri. In his newly formed Dust quartet, he's found open-eared compatriots in the pianist **Lucian Ban**, the bassist **John Hebert**, and the drummer **Randy Peterson**. (*Cornelia Street Café*, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. March 17.)

play, about a murder investigation in a Manhattan apartment building, starring Michael Cera and Chris Evans. (*Helen Hayes*, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

The Lucky Ones

The folk duo the Bengsons composed this semi-autobiographical musical about family tragedy and teen-age passion; Anne Kauffman directs the Ars Nova production. (*Connelly*, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101. Previews begin March 19.)

Mean Girls

This musical version of the teen comedy has songs by Jeff Richmond and Nell Benjamin, direction by Casey Nicholaw, and a book by Tina Fey, who updated her 2004 screenplay. (*August Wilson*, 245 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929. In previews.)

Miss You Like Hell

Daphne Rubin-Vega plays an undocumented immigrant with an estranged sixteen-year-old daughter in this new musical by Quiara Alegria Hudes and Erin McKeown, directed by Lear deBessonet. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Previews begin March 20.)

My Fair Lady

Lerner and Loewe's classic 1956 musical returns to Broadway, in a Lincoln Center Theatre revival directed by Bartlett Sher and starring Lauren Ambrose, Harry Hadden-Paton, and Diana Rigg. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin March 15.)

Pygmalion

The Bedlam company, known for its reimagined versions of classic plays, stages George Bernard Shaw's comedy of upward mobility, directed by Eric Tucker. (*Sheen Center*, 18 Bleecker St. 212-925-2812. Previews begin March 16.)

Rocktopia

Rob Evan and Randall Craig Fleischer created this multimedia concert, in which five vocalists and a symphony orchestra meld Mozart and Beethoven with the Who and Pink Floyd. (*Broadway Theatre*, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. Previews begin March 20.)

This Flat Earth

Rebecca Taichman directs Lindsey Ferrentino's new play, about two thirteen-year olds in a seaside town that has suddenly become the focus of national attention. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Previews begin March 16.)

Three Tall Women

Glenda Jackson, Laurie Metcalf, and Alison Pill play the same woman at different ages in Edward Albee's play, which won the 1994 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Joe Mantello directs. (*Golden*, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Angels in America

Andrew Garfield, Nathan Lane, and Lee Pace star in the National Theatre's revival of Tony Kushner's epic two-part drama about New Yorkers living through the nineteen-eighties AIDS epidemic. Directed by Marianne Elliott. (*Neil Simon*, 250 W. 52nd St. 877-250-2929. In previews.)

Carousel

Jack O'Brien directs a revival of the classic Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, starring Joshua Henry, Jessie Mueller, and Renée Fleming. (*Imperial*, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. In previews.)

Escape to Margaritaville

The songs of Jimmy Buffett, from "Come Monday" to "Cheeseburger in Paradise," are the basis of this new jukebox musical, directed by Christopher Ashley. (*Marquis*, Broadway at 46th St. 877-250-2929. In previews. Opens March 15.)

Frozen

Disney brings its hit film to the stage, with songs by Robert Lopez and Kristen Anderson-Lopez. Caissie Levy and Patti Murin play the sisters Elsa

and Anna in Michael Grandage's production. (*St. James*, 246 W. 44th St. 866-870-2717. In previews.)

Harry Clarke

A return engagement of David Cale's one-man play, produced by Audible and starring Billy Crudup as a Midwestern man who poses as a Londoner. Directed by Leigh Silverman. (*Minetta Lane Theatre*, 18 Minetta Lane. 800-745-3000. In previews. Opens March 18.)

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child, Parts One and Two

J. K. Rowling's tale picks up nineteen years after the novels end, in this play by Jack Thorne, staged by John Tiffany in two installments. (*Lyric*, 214 W. 43rd St. 877-250-2929. Previews begin March 16.)

Later Life

Keen Company revives A. R. Gurney's 1993 romantic comedy, directed by Jonathan Silverstein, about two middle-aged guests at a cocktail party who consider rekindling a flame from thirty years earlier. (*Clurman*, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Opens March 14.)

Lobby Hero

Second Stage reopens its new Broadway home with Trip Cullman's revival of Kenneth Lonergan's 2001



Kenneth Lonergan's "Lobby Hero," revived on Broadway by Second Stage, stars Chris Evans as a cop and Michael Cera as a security guard who find themselves entangled in a murder investigation.

NOW PLAYING

Black Light

The performer Daniel Alexander Jones's inspired creation Jomama Jones is in part an homage to the transformative power of black style. An American pop star who decamped, Tina Turner-like, for Europe, Jomama resides in bucolic splendor, with carefully tended goats and grounds. From time to time, though, when she knows that her country is in trouble—like now—she returns to the States with her mid-Atlantic accent to spread diva dust and sparkle. This ninety-minute spectacle, billed as "a musical revival for turbulent times," is a largely successful attempt to explain the unexplainable, including what it

means to live without borders or jingoism. The show opens with some feel-good ambassador-of-love moments, but, once Jomama gets past her moralizing, she gathers us into her spangled arms and reaches her full height—aided, of course, by six-inch heels and an even taller pile of hair. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/12/18.) (*Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

Edward Albee's *At Home at the Zoo: Homelife & The Zoo Story*

Don't talk to strangers. Or to intimates. Or to anyone at all. In Albee's paired one-acts, Peter (Robert Sean Leonard), a foggyish publisher of boring, important textbooks, is enticed into two painful conversations, first with Ann (Katie Finneran), his wife, then with Jerry (Paul Sparks), a man he meets at the park. Ann, who longs for more excitement in their marriage, wants to know if she and Peter can "become animals." Jerry tells Peter, "You're an animal, too." Of course, it's human self-consciousness—the thing that separates us from animals—and the impossibility of overcoming it that give these plays their humor and sorrow and horror. Andrew Lieberman's set—a few pieces of furniture splayed against the stage's wide expanse—skews abstract, but Lila Neugebauer's sensitively directed and finely acted production grounds the work in everyday behavior and real feeling. (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.*)

Hello, from the Children of Planet Earth

William (Jeffrey Omura) is about to step into the unknown. A NASA engineer, he is responsible for the software tracking the probe Voyager 1 as it enters interstellar space. On the home front, this single workaholic has decided, after much hesitation, to donate sperm to Betsy (Kaaron Briscoe), a lesbian friend from high school. Meanwhile, Betsy's high-strung girlfriend (Dana Berger) and William's man-child colleague (Jon Hoche) strain to provide comic relief. Don Nguyen's comedy, for the Playwrights Realm ("The Wolves"), has a hard time finding the right tone, waffling between unconvincing naturalism—you may find yourself thinking, Who talks like that?—and a whimsical streak, exemplified by the cutesy interventions of Olivia Oguma as the Farthest Explorer, i.e. the Voyager. But the play does reach a heartfelt, bittersweet conclusion, which comes as a surprise after so much forced archness. (*The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.*)

Jerry Springer—The Opera

In many ways, this 2003 piece (directed by John Rando for the New Group) is a meta version of Springer's TV program: banal and titillating. By making an opera about television—a source of entertainment for the Everyman—its British creators, Richard Thomas and Stewart Lee, are forming a marriage of high and low. Springer (Terrence Mann, who is fantastic in the role), bespectacled and unsmiling, is a mirror for the problems of the world. But, before long, we leave this world: when one of the unhinged guests turns the proceedings more than just verbally violent, Springer enters Purgatory. Thomas and Lee have made an unhealthy distraction out of an unhealthy distortion, in which people are not people but types. A star who emerges from the spectacle is the outstanding Tiffany Mann, as Shawntel, a black woman fighting with her racist white husband over her plans to become a pole dancer. (3/12/18) (*Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.*)

Kings

Sydney Millsap (Eisa Davis) has won a special election to the House, becoming the first woman and the first person of color ever to represent her North Dal-

las district, as everyone likes to remind her. Now she's running for reelection with a serious handicap: she's compulsively frank, and her first impulse is always to spar openly with anyone she deems corrupt, which, in Washington circles, is everybody. Sarah Burgess's rhetorically precise and often acidly witty script contrasts Millsap with three consummate Washington insiders, two of them lobbyists (Aya Cash and Gillian Jacobs) and the third a long-serving, avuncular, and unprincipled Texas senator named John McDowell (Zach Grenier). As performed by a flawless Davis, Millsap is, thankfully, no caricature of a righteous crusader, and the play, directed by Thomas Kail, feels like an authentic education in how money works in D.C. (*Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

The Low Road

The theatre where "Hamilton" was born presents the anti-"Hamilton": Bruce Norris's lengthy but propulsive picaresque, which follows the misadventures of a decidedly unlovable antihero in late-eighteenth-century America. Jim Trewitt (Chris Perfetti) single-mindedly applies free-market principles to every predicament, to the great misfortune of all those he encounters. Directed with aplomb by Michael Greif, in its U.S. debut—it was previously mounted in London, in 2013—and performed by a perfectly cast ensemble of eighteen, the play methodically, hilariously, and, in the most pointed moments of a consistently dagger-sharp show, self-reflexively punctures any impulse to seek inspiration from the origin story of the United States, particularly its homegrown, contagious strain of ingeniously exploitative capitalism. It's sort of like an exasperated leftist's version of Voltaire's "Candide," if it had been rewritten with the specifically American dark-comic cynicism of Nathanael West. The wigs, by J. Jared Janas and Dave Bova, are outstanding. (*Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.*)

queens

A drama of dislocation, Martyna Majok's new play, directed by Danya Taymor for LCT3, is mostly set in one room, a gloomy basement in an unnamed Queens neighborhood. Over the years, this low-ceilinged space has hosted dozens of immigrants, mostly women, mostly undocumented. When Inna (Sarah Tolan-Mee), a young Ukrainian woman new to the States, searches out the landlady, Renia (Ana Reeder), she's asking about more than a room: she's also asking about the mother she hasn't seen in twenty years. Majok has a spiky and visceral way with character and a stealthy eloquence, but plotting comes less easily to her. The stop-start revelation of Inna's and Renia's stories, in a narrative that skips around from 2001 through the present, isn't nearly as involving as a long scene in the middle, when four immigrant women drink and smoke and unfold as much of their stories as they dare. (*Claire Tow, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

Admissions Mitzi E. Newhouse. • **The Amateurs** Vineyard. • **Amy and the Orphans** Laura Pels. • **The Band's Visit** Ethel Barrymore. • **Bright Colors and Bold Patterns** SoHo Playhouse. • **The Fall St.** Ann's Warehouse. • **Farinelli and the King** Belasco. • **Flight** The Heath at the McKittrick Hotel. • **Good for Otto** Pershing Square Signature Center. • **Hangmen** Atlantic Theatre Company. • **Hello, Dolly!** Shubert. • **In the Body of the World** City Center Stage I. • **Is God Is** SoHo Rep. • **Once on This Island** Circle in the Square. • **SpongeBob SquarePants** Palace. • **Springsteen on Broadway** Walter Kerr. • **The Winter's Tale** Polonsky Shakespeare Center.

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Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Installation view, *Summer's Song...*, Centre d'art contemporain La Synagogue de Delme, France, July 8–October 28, 2007. Image courtesy of the artist, Cabinet, London, and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
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MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Museum of Modern Art

“Tarsila do Amaral: Inventing Modern Art in Brazil”

Some artists are so iconic they're known by only one name: Brancusi, Léger, Tarsila. Wait, who? The painter Tarsila do Amaral is so famous in her native Brazil that, forty-three years after her death, she helped to close out the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, when a pattern of red-orange-yellow arcs graced the stadium floor, an homage to her 1929 painting “Setting Sun.” That chimerical landscape—a stylized sunset above tubular cactuses and a herd of capybaras that shape-shift into boulders—hangs now in the artist's first-ever museum exhibition in the United States. The show doesn't stint on process-revealing black-and-white drawings or biographical ephemera. (Look for a photo of Tarsila in Paris, with a group that includes a wild-looking Brancusi, hanging out in a boat.) But the paintings are the main event, notably Tarsila's perversely proportioned nudes, including “Abaporu,” made in 1928. Seated in a stripped-down landscape—green ground, a greener saguaro, blue sky, and a lemon-yellow disk that splits the difference between flower and sun—a figure is portrayed in the pose of a thinker, with a tiny head resting on a spindly arm and a monstrously swollen foot, as if the intellect were dwarfed by the body's sensations. The painting's brazenly tropical modernism inspired Tarsila's second husband, the poet Oswald de Andrade, to write the “Manifesto of Anthropophagy,” a call to cannibalize foreign influences, which resounded in Brazilian culture for decades. This sublimely weird show is an eye-opening corrective to an art history that has treated key chapters—those that aren't Eurocentric—as if they were written in invisible ink. As Andrade wrote in his manifesto, “Joy is the decisive test.” *Through June 3.*

Whitney Museum

“Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables”

This retrospective of the Iowan painter fascinates as a plunge into certain deliriums of the United States in the nineteen-thirties, notably a culture war between cosmopolitan and nativist sensibilities. But any notion that Wood—who died in 1942, of pancreatic cancer, on the day before his fifty-first birthday—is an underrated artist fizzles. “American Gothic” is, by a very wide margin, his most effective picture (although “Dinner for Threshers” (1934), a long, low, cutaway view of a farmhouse at harvesttime, might be his best). Wood was a strange man who made occasionally impressive, predominantly weird, sometimes god-awful art in thrall to a programmatic sense of mission: to exalt rural America in a manner adapted from Flemish Old Masters. “American Gothic”—starchy couple, triune pitchfork, churchy house, bubbly trees—succeeded, deserving the inevitable term “iconic” for its punch and tickling ambiguity. The work made Wood, at the onset of his maturity as an artist, a national celebrity, and the attendant pressures pretty well wrecked him. Why Wood now? A political factor might seem to be in play. Although the show was

planned before the election of Donald Trump, it feels right on time, given the worries of urban liberals about the insurgent conservative truculence in what is often dismissed—with a disdain duly noted by citizens of the respective states—as flyover country. *Through June 10.*

Frick Collection

“Zurbarán's Jacob and His Twelve Sons: Paintings from Auckland Castle”

Francisco de Zurbarán was the second-best painter in seventeenth-century Spain—no disgrace when the champion, his Seville-born near-exact contemporary, happened to be Diego Velázquez, who arguably remains better than anybody, ever. In this room-filling show, thirteen life-size imagined portraits, painted by Zurbarán circa 1640–45, constitute a terrific feat of Baroque storytelling: the movies of their day. Each character has a distinct personality, uniquely posed, costumed, and accessorized, and towering against a bright, clouded sky. All appear in the forty-ninth chapter of Genesis, in which the dying Jacob prophesies the fates of the founders-to-be of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. After nearly four centuries, the canvases sorely need cleaning. The brilliance of their colors has dimmed, notably in passages of brocade and other sumptuous fabrics—a forte of Zurbarán, whose father was a haberdasher. But most of the pictures retain power aplenty. Spend time with them, half an hour minimum. Their glories bloom slowly, as you register the formal decisions that practically spring the figures from their surfaces into the room with you, and as you ponder, if you will, the stories that they plumb. *Through April 22.*

Morgan Library and Museum

“Peter Hujar: Speed of Life”

Hujar, who died of AIDS-related pneumonia in 1987, at the age of fifty-three, was among the greatest of all American photographers and has had, by far, the most confusing reputation. This dazzling retrospective of a hundred and sixty-four pictures, curated by Joel Smith, affirms Hujar's excellence while, if anything, complicating his history. The works range across the genres of portraiture, nudes, cityscape, and still-life—the still-est of all from the catacombs of Palermo, Italy, shot in 1963. The finest are portraits, not only of people but of cows, sheep, and, most notably, an individual goose, with an eagerly confiding mien. The quality of Hujar's prints, tending to sumptuous blacks and simmering grays, transfixes. He was a darkroom master, maintaining technical standards for which he got scant credit except among certain cognoscenti. He never hatched a signature look to rival those of more celebrated elders who influenced him (Richard Avedon, Diane Arbus) or those of younger peers who learned from him (Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin). His pictures share, in place of a style, an unflinching rigor that can only be experienced, not described. Tall and handsome, volatile, epically promiscuous, and chronically broke, Hujar lived the bohemian dream of becoming legendary rather than the bourgeois one of being rich and conventionally famous. But he craved more, hungering to have his art recognized while repeatedly forestalling the event with bristly pride. Hujar's personal glamour consorts so awkwardly

with his artistic discipline that trying to keep both in mind at once can hurt your brain. But the conundrum defines his significance at a historic crossroads of high art and low life in the late twentieth century. *Through May 20.*

Museum of the Moving Image

“The Game: The Game”

In a previous project, the multimedia artist Angela Washko staged feminist interventions in the online multiplayer game “World of Warcraft,” a virtual space rife with misogynistic trolling. Here, she presents an interactive video derived from a pervasive real-life game. Players seated at a station, headphones on, find themselves in the role of easy prey: a young woman at a bar, awaiting a late friend. Washko culled her dialogue from the instructional materials of six so-called seduction coaches, or “pickup artists,” who offer techniques for inept straight men looking to score, so to speak. These experts are the basis for her game's aggressive characters, whose come-ons are entertaining or irritating in turns—and harrowing if one gets you alone. A soundtrack by the experimental band Xiu Xiu heightens the anxiety provoked by their high-pressure tactics, while the artist's simple, gritty design, constructed from digitally manipulated cyanotypes, captures the bar's lurid light and close quarters. In Washko's ingenious reconstruction of complex social encounters, there is no standard measure for winning. Instead, players, while navigating the game's multiple-choice menus, are offered insight into a pickup artist's warped reasoning, and given the chance to redo an evening gone wrong. *Through March 25.*

New Museum

“2018 Triennial: Songs for Sabotage”

This show, co-curated by Alex Gartenfeld and Gary Carrion-Murayari, tethers fresh artists to stale palaver. The work of these twenty-six individuals and groups, ranging in age from twenty-five to thirty-five, from nineteen countries, is for the most part formally conservative (painting, weaving, ceramics). The framing discourse is boilerplate radical. The catalogue and verbose wall texts adduce abstract evils of “late capitalism” and (this one may be new to you) “late liberalism,” which the artists are presumed to subvert. In principle, the aim reflects the museum's valuable policy of incubating upstart trends in contemporary art. But it comes off as willfully naïve. Nearly all the participants plainly hail from an international archipelago of art schools and hip scenes and have launched on normal career paths. Noting that they share political discontents, as the young tend to do, is easy. Harder, in the context, is registering their originalities as creators—like bumps under an ideological blanket. Two standouts are painters who evince independent streaks at odds with the ideal of collectivity that the curators promulgate. The Kenyan Chemu Ng'ok, who is based in South Africa, has developed a confidently ebullient Expressionism—faces and figures teeming laterally and in depth—in deep-toned, plangent colors. She's not propagandizing; she's painting. Even more impressive is the Haitian abstractionist Thomm El-Saieh, who lives in Miami. From a distance, his three large acrylic paintings suggest speckled veils of atmospheric color. Up close, they reveal thousands of tiny marks, blotches, and erasures, each discretely energetic and decisive. Grasping for their coherence is like trying to breathe underwater—which, to your pleasant surprise, as in a dream, you find that you can almost do. *Through May 27.*

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Cosima von Bonin

The German artist revisits her favorite theme—maritime absurdity. Plastic sharks and mackerels and soft-sculpture orcas are accessorized with sarongs, ukeleles, surf boards, and stuffed-gingham missiles. (A six-foot-wide aluminum cat-food can hovers overhead, puffing smoke.) Von Bonin pairs ready-made and custom-fabricated elements with the ease of a seasoned set designer, evoking boardwalk-restaurant décor, children's-theatre props, and fashion-runway provocations. Five monochrome wall pieces—off-the-bolt cotton stretched like paintings—lampoon pretensions of latter-day modernism while collapsing distinctions between art and craft. They also hew to the theme, with oblique references to Pop-eye the sailor. *Through April 28. (Petzel, 456 W. 18th St. 212-680-9467.)*

Marina Pinsky

In her first solo show in New York City, the Russian-born artist, who divides her time between Berlin and Brussels, comes across as an ambitious young talent who is attuned to her materials but conceptually overextended. A ceramic model of the Wyckoff House, constructed in Canarsie in 1638, is bound together

with ratchet straps, meant to evoke tensions between Dutch settlers and the native Lenape. Three abstract granite and polyurethane sculptures inspired by images from the T.S.A.'s Instagram feed allude to gun violence and the war on terror. Pinsky's fascination with the juncture of materials and ideas is best exemplified here in a series of lush black-and-white photographs of her own ink drawings of a stylized pine tree, a symbol that appeared both on early American flags and as the emblem of the revolutionary 1913 New York Armory Show. *Through March 31. (303 Gallery, 555 W. 21st St. 212-255-1121.)*

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Fia Backström

In "Aniara," an epic poem written in 1956 by the Swedish Nobel laureate Harry Martinson, human beings flee ecological destruction on Earth in a spaceship bound for Mars. Backström's conceit is that her recent series of photographs, "Fossil," documents evidence of that devastation and has been beamed aboard the vessel by an artificially intelligent entity. The Swedish artist, who works in New York, manipulates her images—shots of plants at a Staten Island nature preserve, microscopic views of

her own bodily fluids, aerial images culled from the Internet—using both analog and digital means, to achieve understated distortions and night-vision-like effects. Painterly prints of mucus, burning Rohingya villages, flowers, hurricane damage, and a refugee detention center in Greece are mounted on colorful plexiglass—an aseptic foil to the subject matter and a stylish, space-age-looking method of preservation. *Through April 8. (Callicoon, 49 Delancey St. 212-219-0326.)*

"The Case Against Reality"

Appearances deceive in this show devoted to cropping and closeups in the work of five American artists. Ridley Howard's precise, pocket-size "Dream Painting, Lugan" deftly juxtaposes a sleeping nude and a misty gray mountain range; the picture, which has shades of Alex Katz-style cool, plays sly pictorial games with mimesis. Milano Chow contributes intricate drawings of architectural details whose subtly disorienting effects undercut their realism. The show's breakout stars are three ghostly works by Chris Duncan, pieces of red and dark-blue cotton that he exposed to sunlight for so long that they faded into photographs of curtains and windowsills—sacred relics of the day to day. *Through April 8. (Marinero, 1 Oliver St. 212-989-7700.)*



The new paintings (including "Mt. Rushmore," above) in Barnaby Furnas's current show, "Frontier Ballads," at the Marianne Boesky gallery, were made with the aid of robotic technologies, designed specifically for the artist with the support of the M.I.T. Media Lab. On view through April 18.

MOVIES



A family gathering gives rise to conflicts and their resolutions in *"Eight Hours Don't Make a Day,"* opening March 14 at Film Forum.

Labor Pains

Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1972 TV series gets a belated American release.

Because the German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder made more than forty movies in his brief career (he died, at age thirty-seven, in 1982), it's inevitable that some of them would slip through the cracks. One of his most elusive works is *"Eight Hours Don't Make a Day,"* a five-part, nearly eight-hour television series that was broadcast in 1972-73 and is only now getting a U.S. release. It's one of Fassbinder's most unusual and self-revealing projects, and it defies political shibboleths of the artistic milieu of the time.

"Eight Hours Don't Make a Day," set in Cologne, is subtitled "a family series," and Fassbinder looks closely at what family life is made of: the intertwined strands of work and love. He unleashes a torrent of intimate horrors in the first five minutes of the first episode, during the sixtieth-birthday celebration of the Epp family matriarch, simply called Grandma (Luise Ullrich), at which a festive and drunken gathering devolves into a round

of smacks and insults over an errant spray of champagne. Yet romantic comedy quickly follows: Grandma's twentysomething grandson, a factory worker named Jochen (Gottfried John), goes to buy another bottle and meets a young woman named Marion (Hanna Schygulla), who works as a receptionist in a classified-ads office. He brings her back to the party, and they quickly become a couple.

Much of the film is centered on Jochen's work; he's devoted to it, and he designs a device to speed up production of the industrial tools that the company manufactures. But, when the resulting increase in efficiency threatens his colleagues' bonuses—and union officials won't help—he incites a job action; when it succeeds, he leads protests that grow all the more daring. Fassbinder builds the series around the inclination to take decisive, albeit risky, action; it's a trait that Jochen shares with Grandma, who, under her air of breezy distraction, displays a brazenly assertive energy. A widow, she picks up an elderly widower named Gregor (Werner Finck), and, as their romance progresses, she also recruits him—along

with Marion, Jochen, and his colleagues—to help her with an illegal scheme to turn a vacant storefront into a nursery school.

Fassbinder fills the series with the details of ordinary troubles—poverty, lack of affordable housing, casual racism, hostile bosses—but in lieu of a blanket denunciation of an implacable system he offers a vision of practical possibilities for local change at work, in the community, and at home. He shows that working-class people already possess the mental, emotional, and social tools to improve their circumstances. In the process, he reminds filmmakers not to depict them as silent and passive victims. With grand cinematic flourishes—a gyrating camera on a factory floor and at a café table, rapturously colorful visions of romance, and hair-trigger comedy of pratfalls and narrow escapes—Fassbinder exalts the exploits of the hidden heroes of daily life. He wasn't naïve; he intended the series to run for another three episodes, which would highlight left-wing activism and show Jochen and Marion having marital problems, but before he could make them the series was cancelled.

—Richard Brody

COURTESY JANUS FILMS

NOW PLAYING

Annihilation

In this numbingly ludicrous science-fiction drama, written and directed by Alex Garland, a talented cast of actors play undeveloped characters delivering leaden dialogue in a haphazard story that's filmed with a bland slickness. Natalie Portman stars as Lena, a medical-school professor and former Army officer whose husband, Kane (Oscar Isaac), a soldier reported dead, turns up gravely ill. En route to a hospital, they are both spirited to a top-secret military facility, where Lena learns that Kane penetrated "the Shimmer," a strange rainbow curtain that surrounds a large seaside nature preserve, and she soon joins four other officers (Jennifer Jason Leigh, Tessa Thompson, Gina Rodriguez, and Tuva Novotny) on a mission to explore its mysteries. It turns out that it involves aliens and heavy-duty gene splicing; the five women confront some conveniently contrived personal issues while facing attacks from a random batch of monsters. Near the end of the film, however, a few elements of design, such as crystalline trees, reveal some inspiration, and a grand conflagration suggests the proximity of the ridiculous to the sublime.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Bad Blood

A masterpiece of ecstatic cinema from 1986, directed by Leos Carax at the age of twenty-five. The neo-noir plot concerns Marc (Michel Piccoli), an older gangster who gets Alex (Denis Lavant), the son of his slain cohort, to break into a laboratory and steal an AIDS-like virus. Along the way, Marc's mistress, Anna (Juliette Binoche), falls for Alex, whose tender romance with his blond teen-age girlfriend (Julie Delpy) is threatened by his rhapsodic obsession with the dark-haired gamine. Carax sends Alex and Anna airborne in a parachute-jump sequence that is one of the movie's many anthology pieces. (The feral Lavant's self-punishing exultation to the strains of David Bowie's "Modern Love" is another.) With an emotional world akin to that of the New Wave masters, a visual vocabulary that pays tribute to their later works, and a visionary sensibility that owes much to Jean Cocteau's fantasies, Carax suggests the burden of young genius in a world of mighty patriarchs who aren't budging. In French and English.—*R.B.* (Film Forum, March 17 and March 20, and streaming.)

Before Summer Ends

The Swiss director Maryam Goormaghtigh reinvigorates the summertime road-trip genre with this lyrical, keenly observed, acutely political comedy. It stars three thirtysomething Iranian men living in Paris, named Arash, Hossein, and Ashkan—nonprofessional actors playing versions of themselves—who take a sentimental journey two weeks before Arash moves back to Iran. Hossein, who is married, is a floppy-haired, ironic, artsy type; the earnest and solitary Ashkan works in photography; and Arash is a socially awkward student who is obese because, as a teen-ager in Iran, he deliberately gained weight to avoid military service—which he's still hoping to avoid when he goes home. As the men motor through the French countryside en route to the Mediterranean Sea, they chat about Iran and France,

tradition and freedom, memories and aspirations (heightened by visions of Iranian landscapes). They also meet people along the way—notably, two musicians, Charlotte and Michèle, whose presence prompts Ashkan's dreams of romance. Then the idyll is shattered by new political circumstances. Goormaghtigh made the film with a few thousand dollars and one assistant, but her poised, ample images and her wryly tender regard for her characters give the film dramatic grandeur to match its global embrace. In Farsi and French.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center, March 17.)

Black Panther

Nothing in Ryan Coogler's previous features, "Fruitvale Station" (2013) and "Creed" (2015), prepared us for the scale of his latest enterprise. Each of those movies probed the experience of a single African-American in detail, and in situ, close to home, whereas the new story summons a fresh homeland altogether—the fictional African nation of Wakanda, which is rich in resources and mightily skilled at concealing them from the outside world. The throne has passed to a young monarch, T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman), who, among his other virtues, is a superhero, donning a special suit to fend off those who threaten his country's peace. They include an arms dealer (Andy Serkis) who steals vibranium, the magical ore that is mined in Wakanda, and a warrior known as Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan), who deems himself more fit to rule than T'Challa. The whole saga marks a startling departure for the house of Marvel, not just in the actors of color who throng the screen but also in the compound of comic-book extravagance and utopian politics. For the most part, the mixture works. With Angela Bassett, Lupita Nyong'o, Forest Whitaker, and, as the king's younger sister, the spirited Letitia Wright.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 2/26/18.) (In wide release.)

Claire's Camera

The South Korean director Hong Sang-soo condenses a grand melodrama of work, love, and art into a brisk sixty-nine-minute roundelay of chance meetings and intimate confrontations. It's set amid—and was actually filmed at—the 2016 Cannes Film Festival, where a young Korean woman named Jeon Manhee (Kim Min-hee) is fired from her job as a film-sales assistant after a one-night stand with a director named So Wansoo (Jung Jin-young), who, unbeknownst to her, is the boyfriend of her boss, Nam Yanghye (Chang Mi-hee). Stuck in Cannes with nothing to do, Manhee befriends Claire (Isabelle Huppert), a teacher from Paris, who's there as a tourist. Claire wanders around with her Polaroid camera, taking pictures of everyone she meets—including Wansoo and Yanghye—and unintentionally sparking uncomfortable reunions. Hong distills vast emotional crises and creative self-recognitions into confessional monologues, pugnacious discussions, and luminous aphorisms. His tightrope-long takes of scenes filmed in settings ranging from the picturesque to the banal (restaurants and apartments, café terraces, Mediterranean beaches) have an intricate dramatic construction, replete with glittering asides and wondrous coincidences, to rival that of a Hollywood classic. In English and Korean.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Early Man

Nick Park's new exercise in stop-motion animation—the same technique that gave quivering and malleable life to Wallace and Gromit—yanks us back to the prehistoric age and thus, inevitably, to the dawn of soccer. A tranquil tribe, whose sylvan way of life is interrupted by a gang of marauders (supposedly more advanced and without doubt more heavily armored) has to compete with them on the playing field for the right to inhabit the precious forest. The leader of the underdogs is Dug (voiced by Eddie Redmayne), and his opposition is Lord Nooth (Tom Hiddleston), who, for reasons best known to himself, sounds French. The gags, as ever, are strewn with generosity, and, since we are watching the work of Aardman Animations, the minutiae are handled with delectable care. The anachronisms, too, are of the best sort—that is to say, the most honestly unabashed. By the lofty standards that Park has set for himself, however, and which have been met time and again in his shorter films, the new adventure feels stretched out and lacking in comic compression; where, you wonder, is Gromit when we need him? With the voices of Maisie Williams, Miriam Margolyes, and Timothy Spall.—*A.L.* (2/26/18) (In wide release.)

A Fantastic Woman

Sebastián Lelio's new movie, set in Santiago, Chile, stars Daniela Vega as Marina, a young transgender woman who loves and loses. Then her real troubles begin. We never learn how she met Orlando (Francisco Reyes), a middle-aged man with a wife and family, but we know that he abandoned his former life for Marina, and we see them dining and dancing and planning a vacation together. Then, without warning, Orlando dies, and Marina discovers, to her horror, that she is forbidden—both by the family of the deceased and by the regulations that govern a conservative society—to grieve her beloved as she wishes. The movie is steady and controlled, and the heroine's composure rarely cracks; only during a few brief excursions into fantasy and daydream is she granted any form of release. There is a tranquil nobility in Vega's defiant performance, yet the story stays morally flat; her character is without blemish, whereas the response that she engenders, in other mourners and in persons of authority, earns nothing but the movie's contempt. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (1/29/18) (In limited release.)

Foxtrot

A young Israeli soldier, Jonathan Feldman (Yonatan Shiray), is reported dead. Details are scarce, but the news is enough to fells his mother, Dafna (Sarah Adler), and to reduce his father, Michael (Lior Ashkenazi), to a state of numbness. It is on their plight that the director, Samuel Maoz, chooses to focus for the first third of the film. He then moves away, and back in time, to the lonely checkpoint where Jonathan was serving; we watch him and his comrades measure out their life in cans of potted meat, amid mud and rain, with only the odd camel to interrupt the ennui. Lastly, we return to the Feldmans, who share a joint and seem in a peculiar mood, the cause of which we don't understand until the bitter end. Maoz's grasp of irony could not be more acute, and his eye for controlled compositions, especially those that snare or

impede his human figures, is careful to a fault; you find yourself wishing, now and then, that the movie would relax. But there's no denying the aplomb of the storytelling, or the dourness of the worlds, civil and military, that are revealed. In Hebrew.—*A.L.* (3/12/18) (*In limited release.*)

Game Night

What starts as a standard-issue romantic comedy, about a youngish suburban couple facing fertility issues, quickly morphs into a garishly overplotted and vainly clever action thriller. Annie (Rachel McAdams) and Max (Jason Bateman) are parlor-game fanatics who host a weekly game night for friends. Max's rich and swaggering brother, Brooks (Kyle Chandler), shows up and insists on taking part—he hires a company to stage a kidnapping mystery that the friends will have to solve. But real-life kidnapers get hold of Brooks instead, and Max and Annie spearhead the effort to bring him home safely. The lively cast, which includes Kylie Bunbury, Lamorne Morris, Billy Magnussen, and Sharon Horgan, make the most of their frantic material, but each character is virtually pinned to the wall with his or her one defining trait; only a sentimental and socially awkward police officer (Jesse Plemons) displays any idiosyncrasy. The script, by Mark Perez, is a trove of pop-culture trivia and a rickety framework of contrivances; the directors, John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein, offer a few nimble gags, but the movie is a hollow throwback to classic comedy, and it shines only by contrast with dull studio competition.—*R.B.* (*In wide release.*)

The Panic in Needle Park

Al Pacino and Kitty Winn star in Jerry Schatzberg's 1971 drama, as a pair of drug addicts drifting through Manhattan's horror holes in a state of mutual self-destruction. The overheated Bobby, a crook since childhood, is a bundle of jitters and motormouthed sass from the city streets. He cools down with the heroin that his girlfriend, Helen, a torpid artist from Indiana, uses to thaw her emotional core (frozen solid by an illegal abortion). The city seems rotted by the schemes of hustlers in need of a fix and by the law's corrupting force (embodied by Alan Vint, as a soft-spoken, hard-nosed detective). Schatzberg doesn't romanticize addicts' troubles; with a tender but unsparing eye, he spins visual variations on shambling degradation and transient relief. His briskly panning telephoto shots, with their tremulous mysteries, reveal a city within a city, a second world of experience that shows through New York's abraded surfaces. The sudden lurch of moods, ranging from bad to worse, is the movie's very subject.—*R.B.* (*Quad Cinema, March 16.*)

Phantom Thread

The role taken by Daniel Day-Lewis in Paul Thomas Anderson's strange and sumptuous film—the actor's final screen appearance, he has claimed—is, in every sense, tailor-made. He plays Reynolds Woodcock, a fashion designer of the nineteen-fifties, who, in the London house that he shares with his sister Cyril (Lesley Manville), creates immaculate dresses for a selection of wealthy women. As devout as a priest in his calling, he seems to resent any intrusion upon his professional peace,

yet he invites a waitress named Alma (Vicky Krieps) into his life as a model, and, eventually, as far more. The result is a pact as perilous and as claustrophobic as that between the guru and his disciple in Anderson's "The Master" (2012), with the camera closing in remorselessly on stricken or adoring faces, and a strong tincture of sickness in the romantic atmosphere. All three leading players respond with rigor to this Hitchcockian intensity, and Reynolds—fussy, cold, and agonized—is a worthy addition to Day-Lewis's gallery of obsessives. The costumes, every bit as alluring as you would expect, are by Mark Bridges, and Jonny Greenwood contributes a swooning score.—*A.L.* (1/8/18) (*In wide release.*)

Red Sparrow

An everyday tale of a Russian ballerina who becomes a secret agent, using sex as her weapon of choice. Why the film is not entitled "The Nutcracker" is beyond comprehension. In the course of the story, adapted by Justin Haythe

from the novel by Jason Matthews, some characters are required to remove their clothes, but, by way of compensation, they get to put on nice thick Russian accents. The heroine is Dominika Egorova (Jennifer Lawrence), who quits the Bolshoi with a broken leg and, on the advice of her uncle Vanya (Matthias Schoenaerts), enters a secluded school, where a fearsome teacher (Charlotte Rampling) trains young men and women to seduce for the motherland. Dominika is let loose on an American, Nate Nash (Joel Edgerton), who, far from being unsuspecting, sees exactly what game she is playing and sets about recruiting her as a spy for the C.I.A. The plot, though thorny, conceals few surprises, and Dominika, beautiful yet often blank, remains a cipher without quite deepening into an enigma. The director is Francis Lawrence, who seems curiously eager to crank up the physical unpleasantness, perhaps in the hope that we will mistake it for thrills. With Jeremy Irons.—*A.L.* (3/12/18) (*In wide release.*)

ABOVE & BEYOND



The Orchid Show

This edition of the New York Botanical Garden's annual Orchid Show, now in its sixteenth year, features the work of the Belgian garden architect Daniel Ost, a widely celebrated floral artist who studied ikebana, a Japanese style of flower arrangement. For this year's presentation, Ost has designed towering plant sculptures and gathered the widest array of orchid species ever assembled for the exhibit. The garden hosts tours, Q. & A. sessions, weekly live-music performances, and classes; the program closes with an extensive Earth Day celebration. (2900 Southern Blvd., the Bronx. 718-817-8700. Through April 22.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's launches its Asian-art sales on March 19, with a session devoted to paintings by modern and contemporary artists from India and the subcontinent. Alongside abstract and semi-abstract works by modernists like Sayed Haider Raza and Maqbool Fida Husain are paintings in a more romanticized vein, such as Raja Ravi Varma's sensual depiction of a partially nude Tillottama (a celestial nymph). Chinese art works (including porcelain, sculpture, and furnishings) follow on March 20, with a trio of dedicated auctions; of particular note is a sale of four Buddhist stone sculptures, the most valuable of which is a stylized limestone bas-relief of

an *apsara*—or heavenly being—kneeling in a devotional pose. (*York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.*) • Asian art floods the galleries at Christie's as well. On March 20, the house lays out a selection of Chinese paintings—mostly scrolls and folding fans—dating from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. Depictions of nature predominate, but a handful of pieces, like Lin Fengmian's "Boatman and Cormorants," include human figures. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000. For a full listing of Asia Week activities across the city, visit asiaweekny.com.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Strand Bookstore

With advancements in A.I., robotics, and pornography racing forward, human consumers are being pitched on the idea of animatronic love. In a talk titled "The History of Tech & the Future of Sex," Lawrence Cappello, a professor of history at Queens College, and Skye Clearly, an associate director at Columbia University's Center for New Narratives in Philosophy, attempt to make sense of the push toward robo-romance. Cappello surveys the sociological effects of technological shifts across history, and Clearly prods at philosophical questions surrounding artificially intelligent companions, including issues of morality and consent. (828 Broadway. 212-473-1452. March 16 at 7.)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

DaDong

3 Bryant Park (212-355-9600)

Dong Zhenxiang, the fifty-six-year-old founder of DaDong (which means “big Dong” in Chinese, a reference to his skyscraping stature) was not born into fortune. The only son in a family of nine children, he took the advice of his father, who counselled him, “You’ll never starve if you are a chef.” Today, the restaurant chain, which has twenty-four branches in China, some of which have been awarded Michelin stars, is synonymous with fine dining and a low-fat duck.

To walk into DaDong’s first international location, steps from Times Square, is a daunting experience, not only because of the formidably tall wooden doors (which are mercifully opened by a well-groomed young man who has been hired to do exactly that) but because, once you’ve entered, the dim lighting, the basalt walls, and the polite reservationist hovering over a rock-shaped desk make you wonder whether you’ve signed up for dinner or a corporate interview.

Let’s get the bad news out of the way: For anyone expecting traditional Peking duck, the DaDong version is a disappointment, though not for lack of effort. The birds, sourced from a specialty farm in Indiana, are smaller than usual, with just the right amount of fat to avoid being too greasy; they are hung to roast in a

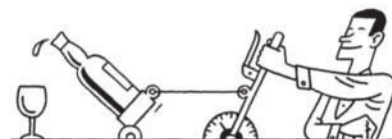
spherical oven developed by Dong. The meat is significantly less flavorful and juicy than what you might expect for ninety-eight dollars (that is, without the optional caviar), but, once you slap on the sweet bean sauce and roll up slices with cucumber and scallions, it still satisfies.

Counterintuitively, perhaps, the best items on the menu are the least expensive. The kung-pao chicken has ethereally tender chunks of poultry and acquires an atomic power by way of whole chili peppers, garlic, and pickled peppers. The braised eggplant is pan-fried and then cooked with soy sauce, sugar, and anise, resulting in little disks that are reminiscent of another Chinese classic, red braised pork.

On a recent weekday night, a few young first-timers, giddy that they’d scored a reservation, took stock of their rarefied company—all slinky bodies in Burberry coats and Chanel boy bags—and made sure to carefully chew the dainty portions they’d been served. They had already decided that the meal fit well with their dieting regimens. One woman, cutting a piece of Kobe beef the size of a matchbox, priced at fifty-two dollars, into small enough chunks that it could be shared, remarked to her companions that the DaDong experience reminded her of a quote she hadn’t heard until she moved to New York: “You can never be too rich or too thin.” (*Dishes \$4–\$195.*)

—Jiayang Fan

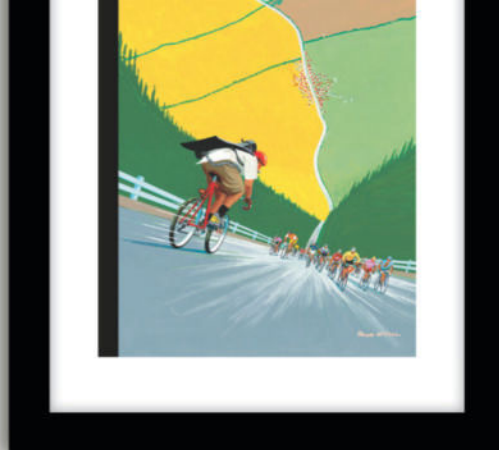
BAR TAB



Lucy’s

135 Avenue A (212-673-3824)

In 1992, when Ludwika Haraburda Mickevicius was offered this bar—a low-ceilinged dive on the edge of Tompkins Square Park, where she had worked since immigrating from Poland, a decade earlier—she was packing to move to Florida. The owner, who was also Polish, had heard the escape plan and decided that she, too, wanted out. She asked Ludwika—known to regulars as Lucy—to take over the liquor license so that she could retire. “Long time you’ll be happy,” Lucy recalls the woman saying, and so she agreed. Twenty-six years later, not much has changed: the interior looks like an archived “Twin Peaks” set (wood veneer, linoleum flooring, fluorescent red lighting), and, aside from biannual trips to Poland, when she shuts the place down for several weeks, Lucy still works from open to close. A few nights after Valentine’s Day, she stood behind the bar, serving Żywiec beer to a pair of mid-career artists who were lamenting the burdens of polyamory. Katja, Lucy’s granddaughter, stacked crates of P.B.R. and poured żubrówka—a lush rye vodka, flavored with grass from the Białowieża Forest—for tourists. In the back, East Village lifers shot pool, and a man celebrated his roommate’s arrest, which had resulted from a brawl over unpaid rent. Flush for now, he bought a round of Serbian slivovitz (a throat-burning plum brandy) and toasted the N.Y.P.D. in absentia. Lucy calculates end-of-night tabs (cash only) from memory, a practice that rewards endurance. At 4 A.M., she cut the lights and shooed people out with a flashlight. A straggler asked Katja if she’d take over the bar. A voice slurred from the sidewalk, “Katja, darling, I love you!” “I hope not,” she said, and let the door slam behind her.—H. C. Wilentz



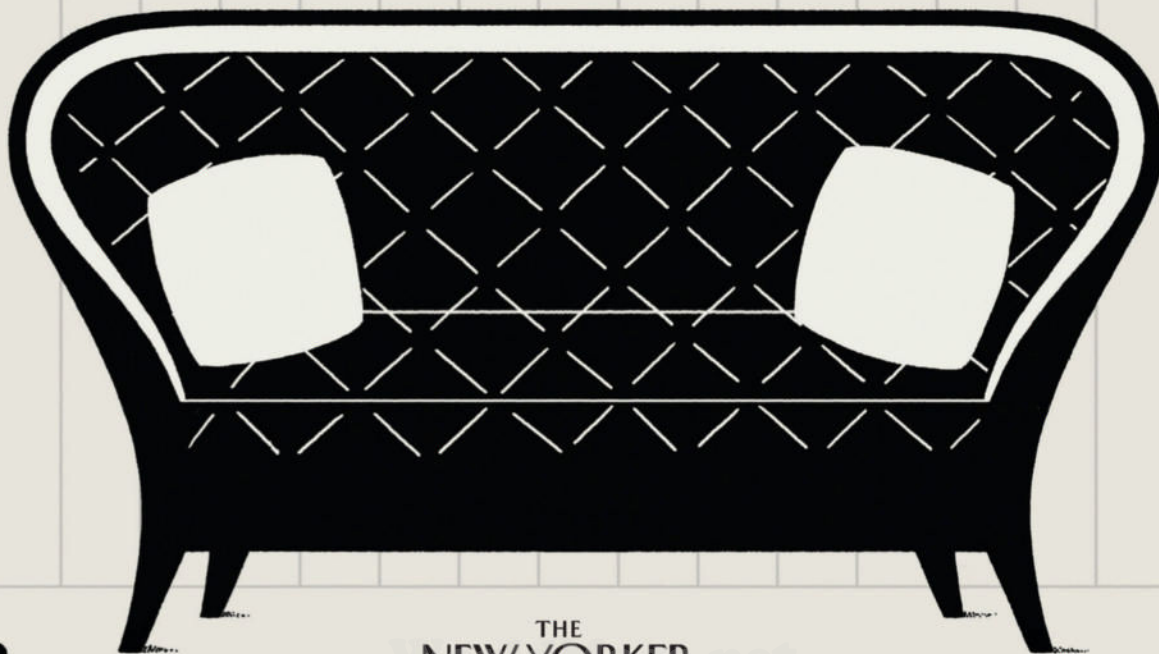
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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT ILLIBERAL ARTS

Minute by minute, the wheels are coming off the clown car that is the Trump Administration. The circus animals are deserting, wriggling through every available window and door. Last week, it was the chief economic adviser, Gary Cohn, who had countenanced the President's falsehoods and flights of bigotry but who finally took a stand on the question of steel and aluminum tariffs. Still others—the Secretary of State, the national-security adviser, the chief of staff, the Chief Daughter, and the Feckless Son-in-Law—are surely imagining either their own retirement from government service or multi-part indictments. Meanwhile, Robert Mueller's investigation grows increasingly ominous for the President. Also, porn stars.

But the spectacle on Pennsylvania Avenue diverts attention from an arguably more consequential matter; namely, who now speaks for the values and the institutions of a liberal democratic country? Donald Trump did not ignite but merely joined a miserable, destabilizing trend of illiberalism that has been under way for years in Russia, Turkey, China, India, Southeast Asia, and Western, Eastern, and Central Europe. In France, Germany, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, far-right parties and factions have not yet taken power, but they are contenders to do so, and they influence the debate on everything from immigration to foreign policy.

Trump is not the most extreme case.

He may denounce his own Justice Department as disloyal and skeptics in the media as "enemies of the people." But, at least for now, he operates within a constitutional order—a still-standing system of laws, a separation of powers, and a civil society—that has so far proved resilient. Yet the threat of Trumpism is unique in its scale and its influence. It is one thing for Viktor Orbán to shrink the nascent liberties of post-Communist Hungary, a nation of fewer than ten million people; it is another for Trump to assume the title of "leader of the free world," when he has such casual disregard for democratic freedoms and assumes control of an unimaginably powerful arsenal with no sign of recognizing the gravity of his responsibility. As President, Trump is the putative guardian of a set of political values, and, no matter how often those values have been undermined, threat-

ened, or betrayed in the course of American history, they have served for countless millions abroad as a democratic standard, an ideal.

Trump's illiberalism—his cockeyed expressions of admiration for such leaders as Vladimir Putin, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Rodrigo Duterte, and his heedless detachment from American norms—betrays that faith. It has also inspired a stream of books with titles like "How Democracies Die," "Can It Happen Here?," "The Road to Unfreedom," "Why Liberalism Failed," and "It's Even Worse Than You Think." Yascha Mounk, the author of the most recent addition to this library of anxiety, "The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger & How to Save It," offers a trenchant survey from 1989, with its democratic euphoria, to the current map of autocratic striving, "from Athens to Ankara."

Mounk, who teaches government at Harvard, points out that one reason for the increasing indifference to democratic rule and the rising enthusiasm for authoritarian alternatives, particularly among young people, is the widening historical distance from any direct experience of the horrors of German Fascism or Soviet Communism. "Over two-thirds of older Americans believe that it is extremely important to live in a democracy; among millennials, less than one-third do," Mounk writes. In 1995, "only one in sixteen believed that army rule is a good system of government; today, one in six do." It's easy to forget that we live in alarming times when you can just switch



the channel to “Vanderpump Rules.”

Mounk emphasizes that history laughs at complacency and illusions of permanence. Athenian democracy lasted two centuries, the Republic of Venice a millennium, but both eventually faced decline and dissipation. The Trump era represents a test of sturdy-seeming American values, and the stakes are global. Just as a prosperous and self-confident American government helped rebuild Western Europe and Japan after the Second World War, and then helped protect them for decades—through the establishment of various security, diplomatic, and economic alliances—the Trump Administration’s disdain for that legacy has left our allies feeling exposed and vulnerable. European leaders routinely tell reporters and former American officials that the U.S. government is barely recognizable to them, in rhetoric or in action. The reductions in the diplomatic corps have often left them with no one to talk to; the Administration’s transactional relation-

ships with authoritarian regimes give them the sense that the President is uninterested in any moral dimension in his foreign policy.

The next significant chapter in this stress test for liberal values will be the midterm elections of November, 2018. If the Democratic Party fails to win a majority in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, Trump will be further emboldened. His capacity for recklessness will multiply and go unrestrained. The Republican leadership, which has already proved shocking in its cowardice, will be even less inclined to challenge him.

Popular resistance to Trumpism began on the Mall the day after his Inauguration. The youthful uprising against the National Rifle Association in south Florida is the newest source of inspiration. But, for Trump and Trumpism to be rendered an unnerving but short-lived episode, history will require more than cogent critique. It will require that millions of men and

women who do not ordinarily exercise their franchise—some sixty per cent in off-year elections—recognize the imperatives of citizenship. For those who aspire to office, it will require not merely renunciation of a President but an affirmation—critical and thorough—of the values and the institutions that the President has scorned and threatened. It will require an honest, complex, open-minded debate on immigration, income disparity, distrust of government, guns, race, gender, speech, social media, and the environment.

Such a debate will mean grappling with the many ways in which American values have yet to be fully realized. In the 2016 election, this territory was too often left to Trump’s demagoguery and his promise of simple solutions. But, whether or not the clown car is finally pulled over by the rule of law, the restoration and the renewal of America’s democratic traditions will be achieved only by democratic means.

—David Remnick

THE BOARDS ONE MORE TIME



On Wednesday night this winter, Jo Ann Veneziano saw “Sweeney Todd” at the Barrow Street Theatre for the hundred and sixth time. (The count now stands at a hundred and thirty-seven.) You would not be wrong to describe her as an extreme theatregoer. She is partial to musicals, often taking in nine performances a week, if you include cabaret acts. Between 2001 and 2004, she attended two hundred productions of “Urinetown”; in 2006, it was “The Wedding Singer” (a hundred and seventy). “Right after that closed, in 2006, was when I jumped to ‘Spring Awakening,’” Veneziano said, over a pre-theatre salad and a hard-boiled egg. “I saw that five hundred and thirty-three times, plus three when it was on tour later, which I usually don’t count.” Even so, she may hold the record for a contest that doesn’t exist.

Veneziano gives her age as “thirty-

nine and ten-twelfths.” When asked, via e-mail, how a playwright might characterize her in stage directions, she replied, “Her face betrays no emotion, while her eyes tell all. Excitement is contained. Do not mistake her stillness for disinterest. She is probably just tired.” (She typically leaves her house, in Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey, at 6 A.M. for her accounting job in Yonkers, and returns at around midnight. The nearly two-hour commute involves a bus, a subway, and a train.) To this description you could add that she has long brown hair, parted in the middle, like a stage curtain. At “Sweeney Todd,” she wore a bomber jacket from “It Should Have Been You” (it closed prematurely, but don’t blame Veneziano: fifty-five viewings).

The first Broadway show Veneziano ever saw was “Les Mis,” the ticket having been a confirmation gift, when she was fourteen. “We sat front row center, so from the beginning that’s where I wanted to be,” she said. And that is where she can be found. (Rare exceptions are made if the row is unavailable.) It is a spot that insulates her from the audience. “Certain noises discombobulate my central nervous



Jo Ann Veneziano

system,” she said. During a performance, she holds a purple Gumby-like figure and squeezes it whenever she hears an irritating sound.

For this production of “Sweeney Todd,” the theatre is configured as a London pie shop, with the audience seated at communal tables. There is no front row. “There are only maybe six seats I will sit in for this show,” Veneziano said. “I will not sit between two people. I always sit where I will see the fewest peo-

ple who aren't in the show." As she made her way to seat C1, the coat-check attendant greeted her with a familiar "Hello," as did the souvenir vender, the ticket-taker, and the clarinetist.

The previous Sunday, to mark Veneziano's hundredth time at the show, the cast had surprised her afterward by singing the ballad "Johanna," retooled: "We see you, Jo Ann-a . . . /There's no way that we could miss you/Sitting right in front each time there/Almost close enough to kiss you."

"Thank you for paying our salary," Hugh Panaro, one of the actors, told her. "My salary is your salary," she answered.

"A lot of people assume the theatres give me free tickets," Veneziano said at intermission. "But I pay full price. I make sacrifices. I don't buy expensive clothes or shoes. I don't go on cruises. I don't have kids—just two cats. I'm not an heiress." She didn't want to discuss her salary, but she allocates a large percentage of it—around twenty thousand dollars—to theatre tickets. (She sees between two and three hundred shows a year.) Veneziano avoids buying tickets through Telecharge or Ticketmaster, making her purchases, instead, at the box office, where employees try to accommodate her front-row fetish.

What is it about certain plays that makes Veneziano need to keep going back? "With shows I've gone to over and over, there is always a point when something happens, and I know I need to see it happen again," she said. "It could be a single musical phrase or a line reading, or the tiniest bit of staging or a particular actor's reaction to something; once it happens, I start thinking about how I need to come back and be there when it happens again." With "Sweeney," it might have been when Norm Lewis—in the title role—"scream-sang in my face," she said. "I knew I had to go back, and I had to be that close. It was a lot like sitting onstage at 'Spring Awakening.' You know you are not a part of the show, but for a moment you are allowed to think you are."

As Act II got under way, Veneziano abruptly reached across the table and slapped it—a stern reprimand to two women across from her who'd been chatting. They stopped.

—Patricia Marx

EVERYDAY DEPT. CAFFEINATED



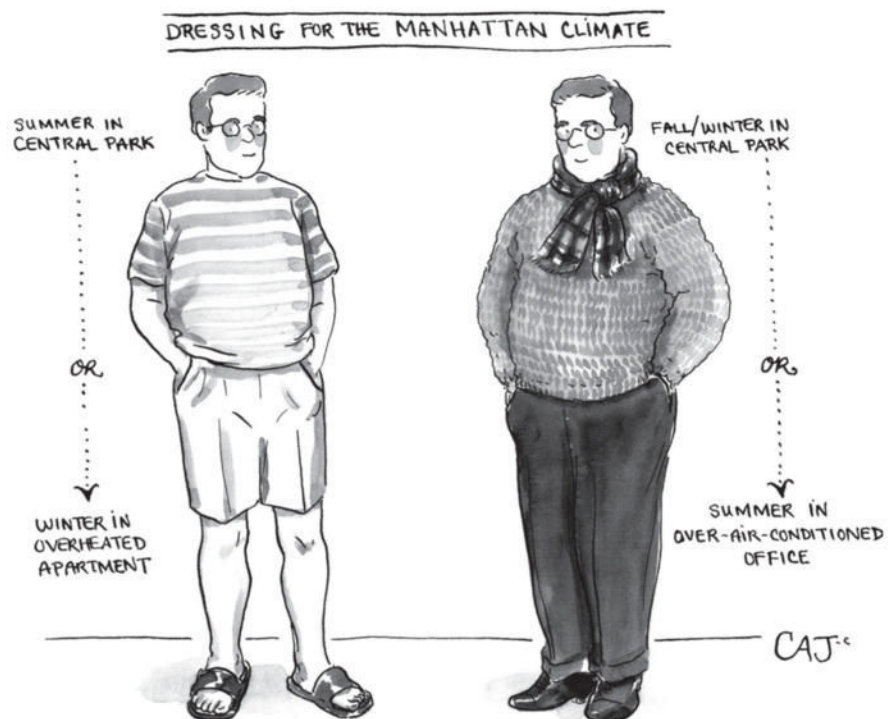
The architects Louise Harpman and Scott Specht began collecting takeout-coffee lids when they were in college, in the nineteen-eighties, and continued the practice as graduate students at Yale. Separately, and unbeknownst to each other, they had amassed, in their dorm rooms, a trove of everyday objects that they found aesthetically pleasing. Specht had glass radio tubes, medicine bottles, and airline-safety cards; Harpman had Ferrara Pan candy boxes, flypaper packaging from the forties, and hot-water bottles. They both had coffee lids. Once they learned of their shared interest, they began comparing notes, like trading-card fanatics.

"There was the Wawa convenience-store lid, the 7-Eleven, the Dunkin' Donuts," Harpman recalled. "It was, like, 'Oh, I found this one, do you have that one?'" After they merged their collections and married, they ran an architecture firm, Specht Harpman, for twenty years, until they separated and

split their practice. All the while, the coffee-lid collection grew; at some five hundred and fifty lids, it is likely the world's largest. (In 2012, the Smithsonian acquired a selection. "We only gave them ones we had duplicates of," Harpman said.) Harpman now teaches at N.Y.U. and lives nearby, and Specht divides his time between New York and Austin. The coffee lids have stayed together, in acid-free boxes, under Harpman's bed.

On a recent Tuesday, Specht and Harpman, bright-eyed and caffeinated, met at Lafayette, a French café in NoHo, for field research. They had brought with them their new book, "Coffee Lids: Peel, Pinch, Pucker, Puncture," which includes color photographs and original patent drawings for more than two hundred unique lids. (The subtitle refers to method of access.) Harpman wore a white blouse under a navy cape coat; she had pushed her glasses up into her bob. "The biggest distinction in the taxonomy is whether you peel away part of the lid, so you can actually get your lip on the cup, or, like this one"—she held up her latte—"you drink through the piece of plastic. There's one I like best, by a designer named Morris Philip, that sits *down* in the cup."

Specht nodded. He was wearing a



fitted jacket over a dark shirt, and steel-rimmed glasses. "I love the megalomania of that cup," he said.

In the time before lids (B.L.), when people carrying coffee moved at a slower pace, there was only a rimmed plastic snap-on disk, patented, in 1950, by James D. Reifsnyder, of the Lily-Tulip Cup Corporation. It contained no drinking holes. After the 1983 Dodge Caravan/Plymouth Voyager hit the road, with built-in cup holders, lids like the Solo Traveler, designed by Jack Clements (and now in MOMA's collection) introduced a small drain, for overflow, in addition to a sipping hole. The field-guide section of "Coffee Lids" includes pages on "Ergonomic Drink Apertures" ("the sippy cup"), "Foam Accommodation Techniques" ("the FoamAroma"), and "Slosh Drainage Systems" (Nyman Manufacturing Company Model 11096: "a mess waiting to happen").

Harpman mentioned a recent prize. "Last summer, in London, somebody's walking across the street with *this* crazy lid." She fished a Ziploc bag from her handbag.

"The bug-eye lid," Specht said. It was covered in plastic buttons to indicate the type of drink: *choc, cap, special, latte, white, mocha*.

"It's from *McDonald's*!" Harpman said, brandishing the lid. "I'd thought the pinch category was dormant."

Around the corner, at La Colombe, Specht grabbed two lids from behind the counter while a clerk's back was turned. "They have the Viora lid," Harpman said. "This is the one *Wired* thinks is the best." It has a thin rim and a recessed space for the nose.

Specht brought up a failed expedition to Gasoline Alley, an upscale, minimalist coffee shop nearby. "Yesterday was unbelievable," he said. "We walk into the place, and they're, like, 'What are you guys doing?' We told them a bit about our research, and the manager came out and said, 'We need to call the owner.' People are so paranoid."

On the street, Harpman pointed out several orange-and-white striped street barricades ("They're just everywhere"), and counterweighted fire escapes ("Incredibly beautiful"). Specht extolled the menus from restaurants like IHOP, which show photographs of

food ("I have a huge basket of those").

In Think Coffee, a man in a blazer, holding two hot drinks, waited while the pair examined the dimples on the compostable lids. "Decaf, cream, and black—that's all," Specht said.

They decided to try Gasoline Alley again, lowering their voices as they entered. Specht took a lid from a shelf. "You've got a basic, a generic," he mused. "This must be gaining leadership."

"We saw that one at Darkstar," Harpman noted.

The barista, a bearded man in an apron, had been watching. "I'm not trying to stare," he said. "Anything I can help you with?"

Harpman gave a friendly wave. "We're thinking!" she said. They exited quickly.

—Anna Russell

CIRCUS LIFE AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION



When it comes to town, the UniverSoul Circus, a one-ring show that plays in cities on both coasts, often pitches its orange tents streaked with yellow lightning-bolt designs in an empty lot in Newark. Suburban commuters in trains passing on the elevated tracks to Newark Broad Street Station looked at the tents for a second, then back at their phones. Probably they did not know the extreme scariness of what was going on inside. Guys were limboing under flaming limbo bars. A woman was hanging only by her teeth high in the air and spinning like a top. A man in cargo shorts, whom the ringmaster had pulled from the audience, was dancing in front of everybody—mortifying! Why did he ever agree to do that? Another audience member's heart was racing in fear that the guys with rainbow Afro wigs and white shirts and plaid ties who were charging up and down the aisles would pick him for something, as the ringmaster had picked the cargo-pants guy.

The UniverSoul Circus, which will set down later this month in Roy Wilkins Park, in Jamaica, Queens, is

the most audience-participatory circus in the world, according to its advertising. "Put your hands together!" is not just a suggestion. "Get up outta your chairs!" means what it says. Audiences shout back to the ringmaster's questions, which are often posed in the form of upwardly rising blasts on his whistle, and sing along with the music, and dance until the canvas rafters shake. Outside the tents, on a Sunday afternoon, the streets of downtown Newark were sunny and almost empty. The kind of quiet that involves only vehicular noises reigned. In Washington Park, a three-minute walk away, the statue of Seth Boyden, who refined a process for making patent leather, struck a stalwart pose for nobody. On an adjoining corner, the Newark Bears stadium sat locked up and abandoned. The Newark Bears, once a minor-league baseball team, are no more.

Across the side of a tall building, in black letters on a yellow background, stretched the words "'America is too great for small dreams.'—Ronald Reagan." A motel frequented by unsavory people once occupied the lot where the circus now was. The city tore the motel down in 2007; Cory Booker, Newark's mayor at the time, took the symbolic first whack at it with the wrecking machine. Since then, the lot has been occasional home to large congregations of empty dumpsters, rows of semitrailers, and heaps of trucked-in, grime-covered snow. Every spring the tents appear, the circus vehicles crowd one another bumper to fender, and sometimes a smell of elephant perks up Division Street.

As the afternoon grew warmer, the roustabouts (how often does one get to use that word?) raised the lower edges of the tents to let in some air. Industrial fans the size of searchlights whirled. In the ring, young women from Dalian, China, rode small bicycles every way they could be ridden. The show's three elephants entered, did an act without enthusiasm, and left, guided by an unenthusiastic trainer. To give them room, a backdrop opened tall and wide and the audience suddenly saw clear through to the elevated tracks baking in the bright sunshine. Then a ripping sound of motorcycle engines exploded close by, and dare-

devils came flying through another opening in the tent. They soared almost to the very top of the tent pole, somehow missed all the structural paraphernalia up there, landed on a ramp, and sped out the tent's other side. Over and over, they did this, sometimes entirely parting company with their motorcycles along the way and then joining up with them again in midair. The spotlight beams turned cigarette-smoke blue with engine exhaust.

After the show's finale, which featured flags from many nations, the crowd filed out past a concession where kids could ride on one-hump camels. The camels—there were two—curled their lips in contentment. To be a camel on the streets of an American city was an out-of-the-box approach to existence that was working out beautifully for them, their expressions seemed to say.

—Ian Frazier

STARCH DEPT. WHITE SALE



On a recent cold Monday morning, a line of determined-looking women snaked around the corner of Park Avenue and Fifty-eighth Street. Seven of them wore fur coats; one, in a wheelchair, was accompanied by a nurse. Their destination: spring, or the springlike profusion of floral sheets, pillowcases, and cocktail napkins at the D. Porthault store, which was holding its biannual sale.

Judy Sanger, a poet, stood near the front of the line, wearing a fur hat. She explained that her mother had bought Porthault sheets, as had her grandmother. "In my mother's day, if the bias edging frayed you could bring the sheets to the shop and have them sent to Paris for hand repair," she recalled. She favors the Coeurs print, based on the Duchess of Windsor's heart doodles, and Trèfles, a clover pattern adapted from the signature of the poet Louise de Vilmorin.

In 2005, Bernard Carl, a Washington, D.C., lawyer, bought the company as a gift for his Francophile wife,

Joan. Not much had changed since Madeleine Porthault pioneered the printing of patterns on sheets, ninety-three years ago, but the Carls had made some improvements. There's a new factory, a Harrods boutique, and an e-commerce site.

Still, anticipation among the shoppers ran high. (A set of vintage yellow Doubles Coeurs sheets makes an appearance in one of the love scenes in "Call Me by Your Name.") "I knew about the sheets from design blogs and wanted them for years," Karen, a classical musician, said. She was hoping to buy a second set of sheets. "I have a very tolerant husband."

At exactly 10 A.M., a saleswoman dressed in black unlocked the door, and the crowd surged forward. "You know what to do," a middle-aged woman in a fur toque instructed her housekeeper, who had been saving a place in line. "You go to Towels; I go to Sheets."

Inside, each customer was handed a large brown-paper shopping bag. The air smelled of vinyl packaging; deals lurked around every corner. The price of a lilac-printed queen-bed set with scalloped edges had been cut from twenty-four hundred dollars to sixteen hundred and eighty. A poppy-bedecked bath sheet was \$283.50, reduced from four hundred and five dollars. A twelve-by-sixteen-inch boudoir sham could be had for two hundred dollars (without pillow insert), and tissue-box covers were seventy-five dollars. The cheapest item, at ten dollars, was a hair scrunchie.

Pat Skeffington, a technology manager who for the past few years has travelled to the sale from her home, in Iowa, roamed the floor. "I iron my own," she said, of the sheets. All Porthault aficionados agree that the bedding must be pressed. Ordinary detergents will fade the patterns; a dryer will mangle both the voile and the linen.

A sales associate, her arms piled high with percale, consulted with a blond customer, as the two moved efficiently through the scrum. "We have the Euros, the standards, the throw pillows so far," the associate said. "Did you want the neck rolls?" ("Definitely.")

Rifling through a bin of queen-size bed sets, a mother wearing a fur vest nagged her teen-age daughter, who



looked as though she'd rather be anywhere else. "You have to pick *something*," the mother said. "Your bed is a disaster."

"It's for a man, so probably not the hearts," a patron who was already clutching three voile nightgowns told an employee in the bedding area. "No, not the Euro sham!" another woman barked. "The Paris sale is more civilized," a third added. The woman in the fur toque bustled by with her housekeeper, weighed down with a shopping bag full of flowery linens.

At the register, the sales force dealt calmly with an ill-timed Verizon outage. "I need you to update my online profile," a customer said as she waited to pay for the two large shopping bags that she'd stuffed with loot. "We've gotten a new place since I was last here. Two more queens and two twins."

"People are buying like they're giving it away," another customer said, looking around. "I just spent eight hundred dollars on towels, and I feel like I robbed a bank."

Marie-Noelle Levin, an actress and day trader, pulled up on a bicycle, dressed entirely in fur. "At night I have a driver, but in the daytime I do as I please," she said, fussing with her lock. "I hate what's happening in this country," she went on, referring to the political climate. "I'm from Paris, and in Europe they don't believe it. Here"—she gestured toward the crisply folded linens in the window—"at least things are beautiful."

—Sadie Stein

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

DREAMLAND

India Mahdavi's polychromatic vision.

by Lauren Collins



In November, the St. Regis Shanghai Jingan hosted a “midnight supper” for the fashion designer Jason Wu. The event, which, according to a press release, was inspired by the late-night soirées of the Gilded Age, necessitated a one-night-only renovation of the hotel’s upstairs bar. The tufted banquettes that line the room were reupholstered in a rosy velvet. Leather wing chairs were traded out for mitt-shaped seats that looked as though they had been made from ladyfingers. In place of a traditional landscape mural, a set of

black-and-white art works in wooden frames ran the length of the room. Behind them, the walls had been covered in pastel paper, making the St. Regis Bar, if not the pinkest room in the world, then probably the pinkest room in Shanghai—a room as pink as peonies, as pink as fibreglass insulation, as pink as the inside of a baby bird’s mouth.

It was also as pink as the Gallery restaurant at Sketch, in London, of which it was a fairly audacious knockoff. Every few years, Mourad Mazouz, the restaurant’s owner, turns the space over to a

different artist. In 2014, he enlisted David Shrigley, who contributed two hundred and thirty-nine line drawings and wittily adorned ceramics to the project, and then asked Mazouz to recruit someone to help with the rest. Mazouz called the architect and designer India Mahdavi. “We had a meeting in London, and, after that, she sent me a plan with the pink, and I immediately said yes,” Mazouz recalled. Mahdavi kept the zigzag marble floor that the previous artist had created, added globe lamps with copper bases, and installed curvaceous furniture of her own design in the layout of a classic brasserie. As confident as she was of the concept, she obsessed over one aspect of its execution. “Oof,” Mazouz said. “A month to find the pink. I didn’t tell her, but after a while I wanted to say, ‘Come on, pink is pink!’”

The pink at Sketch has been described as dusty pink, bubble-gum pink, baby pink, and—by a Reddit user—as “getting drunk inside a vagina.” Patrick Baty, a paint historian and the author of “The Anatomy of Color,” considers it a “blue-ish pink,” which, he said, often conjures associations with feminine things, like lingerie and candy. According to “On the External Characters of Minerals,” a seminal taxonomy of color produced in 1774 by the German geologist A. G. Werner, the pink that Mahdavi chose corresponds most closely to Aurora Red, which can apparently be found on the pied woodpecker (animal), apples (vegetable), and orpiment (mineral). Mahdavi describes the Sketch pink, whose Pantone reference is Rose Quartz 13-520, as a “pink that is like the essence of pink.”

There have been rages for various iterations of pink before. As Kassia St Clair explains, in “The Secret Lives of Color,” the sensation of the summer of 1775 was puce, so called after Louis XVI’s observation that one of Marie Antoinette’s gowns reminded him of “the *couleur de puce*—the color of fleas.” Sketch’s pink is only a touch lighter than Baker-Miller pink, also known as “drunk-tank pink,” which became familiar in the late nineteen-seventies when a paper published in *Orthomolecular Psychiatry* claimed that a pair of correctional officers named Baker and Miller had seen a drastic improvement in prisoners’ behavior after applying

The Gallery at Sketch, the most Instagrammed restaurant in London.

the color to a holding cell. The paper read, "In fact, so aware are the inmates in San Jose of the pink color's powerful effect that they have been scratching at the pink color to remove it from the cell's walls."

The current pink revival has a complicated genealogy, but Mahdavi is one of its progenitors. Sketch opened a few months after Wes Anderson released "The Grand Budapest Hotel," with its two-toned namesake. Two years later, Pantone, describing Rose Quartz 13-520 as "a persuasive yet gentle tone that conveys compassion and a sense of composure," named it a Color of the Year. The term "millennial pink" was coined around the same time. There is a persistent belief that Sketch is the most Instagrammed restaurant in the world, but, according to Instagram, it is merely the most Instagrammed restaurant in London. In addition to inspiring imitators—in Seoul, in Doha, in Paris—it has become a stop on the style Internet's equivalent of the Camino de Santiago—"a basic bitch holy site," in the words of one blogger. A not insignificant portion of the visitors who post pictures from the room appear to have dressed to match it. An image of the Gallery is an urban nature photo, as perennially like-getting as a tropical beach or a fluorescent-streaked sky. "Today we're subjected to spending a lot of time dealing with these cold digital interfaces," Mahdavi said. "I think we're seeking visual comfort."

Mahdavi is a sort of supertaster for color, a possessor of perfect chromatic pitch, which she seems to experience as taste, touch, feel, and smell. She'll describe a mint green as "a color that makes me thirsty," or perceive "crushed raspberry" where others might see fuchsia. "I like to mix and let them insult each other, have an argument," she has said, of colors, as though they were guests at a dinner party. "India can change the way we see color," Garance Doré, the illustrator and fashion blogger, told me. "It might sound small, but, for anyone who works in creativity, it's a beautiful and exciting thing." In the 2006 movie "The Devil Wears Prada," Miranda Priestly, the fashion-editor character played by Meryl Streep, explained how the recondite decisions made at the highest levels of the style

industry trickle down to the rest of us, meaning that the cerulean sweater or blush bathroom for which you have developed a seemingly independent desire was actually "selected by the people in this room from a pile of stuff." Social media has made the process faster and farther-reaching, so that a fetching restaurant in London can, to an extent, turn the world pink.

"The color of my childhood was strawberry milkshake," Mahdavi said recently. She was born in 1962, in Tehran, to an Iranian father and an Egyptian mother. Mahdavi's maternal grandmother was a famed Cairo socialite. "She dressed in haute couture, smoked cigars, and was probably the first woman in Egypt to drive and play golf," Mahdavi said. Her parents met in Paris, when her father accompanied her mother's cousin there, on a school break from Oxford. In Tehran, the same Scottish nanny who had cared for Mahdavi's mother looked after the Mahdavi children, of whom there were eventually five. In 1964, Mahdavi's father received a grant to go to Harvard, and the family moved to Cambridge. "My father wrote a critique of agricultural reform, and the Shah got really pissed off," Mahdavi said, explaining why they never returned to Iran. Suddenly an American kid, she saw the world in postwar primaries: the green of "The Jungle Book," the red of a Play-Doh lid.

In May of 1968, the Mahdavis decided to move to France. Global nomads in an analog age, they allowed India to keep one Teddy bear, while her other belongings went into storage. According to family legend, they arrived at the airport only to be told that Paris was unreachable, on account of the student riots. "They said, 'You can either have a plane to Belgium or Germany,'" Mahdavi recalled. They flew to Frankfurt, ending up in Heidelberg.

Germany was black-and-white: the only thing Mahdavi liked about it was "this Gothic 'Addams Family' house that we lived in." Eventually, they made their way to the South of France, living in Nice for less than a year before settling in an apartment in Vence. After the cartoonish abundance of America,

Mahdavi found France austere, but she revelled in the palette of the Mediterranean. At times, the Mahdavi household sounds like a loopier, more cosmopolitan "Cheaper by the Dozen." Mahdavi recalled, "My father instigated a democracy in our family, and every week the president would change." The children attended a progressive school where they were encouraged to dig, build forts, climb trees, and be as autonomous as possible. The curriculum suited Mahdavi, who had adopted a duck and a chick.

Four countries in seven years makes a mark on even the worldliest child. "I learned it was possible to express myself other than through language," Mahdavi said. As her physical surroundings fluctuated, she took up residence in a fantasy world she called Palapimsosak. (She later realized that the name derived from her misunderstanding of a Farsi lullaby that her father would sing.) "It was a dreamland of happyland," she told me recently. There she could have as many stuffed animals as she wished. "It was the world of children, green grass, and candy colors all around. It was a town of toys."

After earning an architecture degree in France and studying industrial design, graphic design, and furniture design in New York, Mahdavi settled in Paris. She worked for seven years as the artistic director for Christian Liguier, a grandee of luxurious minimalism whose most famous projects include the Mercer Hotel, in New York, and Lee Radziwill's Paris apartment. In 1997, shortly after giving birth to a son, Miles, Mahdavi left the company. "It was the easiest job in the world," she said. "I proposed to Christian many types of possible evolution and, in the end, I just felt I had to move on." After two years of freelancing, she opened her own practice.

The closest thing this world has to a Palapimsosak is the Rue Las Cases, in Paris's Seventh Arrondissement. Mahdavi's headquarters there, spread over three buildings, basically occupy an entire block. She gravitated toward the address for its domestic echoes: "In 'Cases' there's *casa*, and then Charlotte Perriand"—a modernist pioneer—"had her atelier here," she said. In her furniture showroom, at

No. 3, one can find pieces such as Jelly Pea (a pod-shaped sofa with round cushions) and Bluff (a jigsaw puzzle of a coffee table). At No. 19, Mahdavi sells Bishop (a twenty-two-hundred-dollar combination stool and end table that recently entered the permanent collection of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs), as well as plates, cushions, nesting bowls, peanut-shaped trays, folding chairs with seats woven from polymer thread, rattan mirrors that bring to mind space-age shamrocks, blown-glass lamps with rocket-like bases and ballooning shades in improbably gorgeous combinations such as caramel and gray. Mahdavi's virtuosity with color sometimes overshadows her way with form: the lamps looked as though they might levitate off their six-pointed brass feet.

One January morning, Mahdavi was in her offices at No. 5, wearing gray pants, a black sweater, black sneakers, and, tied around her wrist, a silk handkerchief that had belonged to her father, who died in 2015. She is tall, with a delicate voice. She explained the advantages of pursuing her "polyglot and polychrome" vision from this vertically integrated array of spaces: "I want the happiness to be continuous. I want to be happy when I design something, I want the producers to be happy when they make it, I want the girls to be happy when they sell it, and I want the customer to be happy when she buys it." She paused. "Happiness is a big word—maybe joy."

The premises were surprisingly homey: tons of books, a pair of blocky sofas covered in a jammy purple velvet—along with color and curves, the material is one of her trademarks—from a collection Mahdavi did for the fabric manufacturer Pierre Frey. (She thinks of sofas as the "eyebrows" of a room, and likes to place identical ones across from each other.) The aesthetic professions can breed pointless manias—Calvin Klein employees famously received an e-mail decreeing that every object on their desks be black or white and that "coloured flowers or plants received should be taken home at the end of the day"—but Mahdavi

is relaxed about letting her interiors commingle with signs of life. "If, like me, you hang your pictures by eye (no tape measure, no carpenter's level), you'll find yourself filling in those annoying misplaced nail-holes from time to time," she writes in "Home Chic," her 2013 decorating guide. "Arm yourself with a tube of Spackle and a spatula to cover your tracks. A dab of gouache from your children's paint box will finish the job on colored walls." Phone chargers, contemporary kudzu, sprouted from the floor and the walls. In one room, the shelves were filled with prototypes for collaborations: *petits objets* for Louis Vuitton; rugs that looked like lattice-work for La Manufacture Cogolin.

In the section of the office where Mahdavi does architectural interior design, several assistants were seated in front of computers. One was working on an addition to a villa in the South of France, for a family of Italian industrialists, where Mahdavi was trying to convey "a certain sweetness of living that belongs to the Mediterranean." Earlier that week, she had visited the St. Ouen flea market, near Paris, where she spent less time selecting a pair of Italian armchairs in "dirty old rose" velvet than some people do a box of cereal. In her office, dozens of images were taped to the wall: Hotel Il Pellicano in Tuscany, a smiling Romy Schneider emerging from a pool. The deeper Mahdavi gets into Instagram, where she has a hundred and seven thousand followers,

the more she relies on books. "Now the only way to be really original is to go in your own library," she said.

Interior designers are sometimes called on to confer a sheen of taste where it would otherwise be lacking, but Mahdavi's clients—the fashion designer Alber Elbaz, the pharmaceutical heiress and arts patron Maja Hoffmann—tend to have as much culture as they do money, and to use her as a lens to focus their already well-trained eyes. "A house is like a portrait, and, in the end, the place has to look like the person living in it," Mahdavi said. "What I do is capture an expres-

sion, something they didn't expect." She occasionally invokes her artist's prerogative. One day, I overheard her dictate an e-mail to a client who was threatening to finish the exterior of his house in a material that Mahdavi considered atrocious. "Looking forward to seeing you Friday, but know that I will be intransigent on the choice of off-white roughcast," she said, as an assistant typed.

Mahdavi's commercial practice has been confined largely to restaurants and small hotels. (If you want to see my favorite room on the Internet, Google "Villa des Alysamps bathroom.") She has an expert feel for hospitality, in the sense of knowing what will make a person who is far away from home feel welcome. In 2011, at the height of the industrial-chic boutique-hotel craze, she redid the rooms at Maison Thaumieux, in Paris, in flocked curtains, floral wallpaper, and graphic wall-to-wall carpet. "I wanted to saturate them to where it would give them an overwhelming coziness, and suddenly you'd feel like, Oh, this is a grandmother's place," she recalled. Whitney Robinson, the editor of *Elle Décor*, told me, "For Americans, particularly, this kind of bold international style is still very foreign. I think that's why India is not necessarily the household name that she should be."

Recently, though, Mahdavi's exuberant look has been coming back into favor. The hemline index posits that women's skirts rise in tandem with the stock market; perhaps Mahdavi is correct in thinking that an embrace of color corresponds to a desire for cheer amid anxiety, and for sensuality in algorithmic times. Her work at Sketch has led to a flurry of retail commissions, including a RED Valentino store in London and the redesign of two Ladurée tearooms, in Los Angeles and in Geneva. Where the L.A. tearoom features birdcage chairs and mirrored daisies, the one in Geneva has an elegant, almost celestial ambience, with tiny starry lights and a fathomless green edging out a darker-than-usual pink as the space's dominant color. "The green I'm looking for does not exist," Mahdavi said at the beginning of the job. "It's a deep forest green—it's not a spring green but, like, a nature green." The shade



she ended up with looks like a color you haven't seen before, a green that seems somehow darker than black. Ladurée recently hired her to do another shop in Tokyo. "Only India can use a spinach-green color in interior decoration while making it very chic," Safia Thomass Bendali, a Ladurée executive, said.

Later in January, Mahdavi presided over a meeting about a Tod's boutique in London. The brief required that she make it feel less like a store and more like a house. "I wanted to very subtly make the women's floor more masculine and the men's floor more feminine—to say, in a way, that things are changing," she told me. Her crisp mission statement suggested that I was witnessing the juncture in the creative process where current events find their expression in brick or chintz. At one point, Mahdavi told me, of her imitators, "They'll remember the color match, the pattern match. But they apply it so that it just creates an image without the meaning behind it."

She was outfitting the boxy space with swooping curves. She had proposed covering the walls of the men's area in a dark-raspberry dyed silk and upholstering the seats in a matching velvet. Word had come back from Tod's that the over-all effect was a bit dainty. The easy thing to do would have been to throw in some browns and blacks.

"Every view in this boutique has to be something strong," Mahdavi said, picking up a 3-D rendering of the space. She examined a pair of burgundy lacquer display tables that were to be piled with merchandise in the entry hall.

"You know what?" she said to her team. "Mentally reflect. Tod's is originally a brand of driving shoes."

She grabbed a sample of the lacquer in a more assertive red and pushed it around the page, scrutinizing it against the other elements of the room.

"This is the real red," she said. "It's lipstick red. It's the Ferrari."

Mahdavi's apartment, in the Sev-enth Arrondissement, on a February evening at 7 P.M.: a fire, classical music, no overhead lighting, red wine, and a tray of chips and salmon mousse. The walls were off-white. Vases of ra-



"I'd let her go, but she's so good with the kids."

nunculi, pussy willows, and acanthus leaves sat on a table covered in monographs, programs, a bear mask from a museum opening. Gold lamé chairs by Gio Ponti and a dresser by Ettore Sottsass mixed with rugs and lamps and dishes and chairs from Mahdavi's travels, or from her mind. A painting by her friend and client Adel Abdessemed featured the word "EXILE" in a blurred script, as though one were reading it through tear-filled eyes.

Mahdavi sat in the living room on one of a pair of bronze-green velvet couches arranged in her preferred formation. She was balling up the Sunday paper to use as kindling, and poking the logs. "I think this apartment is exactly who I am," she said. "It's layers of my life."

Mahdavi travels constantly, and she had recently returned from visiting her mother, who now lives in Tehran. Iran is one of the wellsprings of Mahdavi's style. "I love the contrast between the brutality of the city and the softness of this," she said one day, showing me

a photograph she had taken of a bourgeois living room, its coffee table laden with textiles, pattern upon pattern, and bowls of fruit. Iran, to her, is mirror-work, marquetry, turquoise, faded glory. The country also has the advantage of being comparatively lightly touristed, giving her access to a creative person's most valuable resource: things that not everyone else has seen. "Iran is inspirational, because the taste is a bit funny," she told me. "They're very free with their associations, and can often go down the wrong route, like kitsch, but that's where you have the best associations." Abdessemed described Mahdavi's style as "a cross between the chromatism of the films of Almodóvar and a form of childlike and joyous orientalism inspired by Iran." He said, "She creates a fantastical version of the East that doesn't exist in the East, a sort of dreamed image."

In the living room, Mahdavi told me that every one of her projects is about answering a certain question. She

seemed to be pondering her own drives. “You have to realize that the work I’m doing today is, I think, partially because I’ve never had a family home,” she said. “Like, my family was my home.” Photographs of her son lined one of two parallel halls running, railroad-style, from the apartment’s entryway to the bedrooms in the back. The place was a rental, she said. She’d lived in it for twenty years, her landlord was the Catholic Church. “I do things for others that I don’t do for myself, and this is probably why I need major therapy,” she said. “I’ve never managed to buy a place in Paris for myself.” She sipped some wine and said, “I just think that sometimes you learn to love the rooms you’re used to, the rooms you see.”

When Mahdavi was a student, she often went to three movies a day. She saw everything: American musicals, George Cukor, Fritz Lang. At one point, she thought she was going to be a film director. “I trained my eye to work like a camera,” she said. Her shutter is never closed, not even near midnight in the back of a taxi on a frigid February evening in Stockholm.

“Can you stop?” she said, as the cabdriver pulled into an alley boxed in by the orange cones and security fencing of a construction site.

“This is a one-way street,” the driver responded. “There is no stopping.”

Mahdavi was undaunted.

“Can you go back?”

She had her iPhone out and was straining to properly frame a shot of the glowing, plastic-sheeted skeleton of a building.

“I like this,” she said. “It’s the perfect abstraction of a building.”

She shared the picture on Instagram.

Mahdavi was in town to give a talk at the Stockholm Furniture Fair. It was her first time in the city, and she planned to stay for a long weekend. That night, she’d gone for a dinner of salmon and aquavit with the organizers of the lecture program. The conversation had turned to millennials. Mahdavi, ignoring pink, said that she thought they used space differently from their elders. “Young kids, they pile everything on the floor, instead of using closets or shelves,” she said. “Nothing is hidden anymore.”

After dinner, she returned to the hotel, a recently opened “five-star design hotel” in a brutalist high-rise. Asked to assess the premises, she zoomed in on a couple of off-putting details. “This is probably a bit oversized, and why would I want to sit there facing a wall?” she said, of a couch in the lobby. But she was intrigued by a banister wrapped in leather, like the grip of a tennis racket.

“I think I figured out why they put on the leather!” she said the next day, over breakfast. “Because it’s a cold country and it’s cold to the touch.” She kept looking around, as though she were tinkering with a blueprint in her head. As the staff started taking away the buffet, she said that she wondered whether, owing to her being a woman or to her designs being perceived as feminine or to some combination of both, she wasn’t considered for certain jobs.

“I’m known for small projects,” she said, draining a carrot juice. “Nobody ever gave me a hotel this size.”

Later that afternoon, Mahdavi’s hosts had arranged a meeting for her with the C.E.O. of a large Swedish hotel chain. They sat drinking coffee in the dim light of a pop-up restaurant on the premises of the fair, which was held in a convention center on the outskirts of the city. They exchanged pleasantries, and then résumés, with Mahdavi talking about her work on the Hôtel du Cloître, a nineteen-room former monastery in Arles.

“So, you do small hotels?” the C.E.O., a statuesque Swede in a power suit, asked.

“No, I’m not afraid of size,” Mahdavi replied.

“What else are you doing?” the C.E.O. said.

Mahdavi launched into a list of her projects: a Big Sur vacation house for an Internet entrepreneur, a book of photographs of Tehran, a commission from Nespresso. It was quietly thrilling to watch someone who was already so close to the top of her profession leaning in, and potentially toward a mass audience.

“Do you have some room for hotels?” the C.E.O. asked.

“I love hotels,” Mahdavi said. “Remember that, whatever you’ve seen of my work, you won’t get. But you’ll get something else.”

Mahdavi had arrived at the fair a few hours earlier, in order to scope out the wares before her talk. She walked briskly through the endless aisles of exhibitors, stopping occasionally to snap a picture or to check a price, her color commentary mingling with social prophecy by way of furniture design.

“High backs are very popular now,” she said, singling out an armchair wrought in the sort of rattan that she had helped make fashionable. “What is it? You put a back on something and you’re basically making a wall.”

“I would like you to look and note how many small tables there are everywhere. We’ve all become mobile because of our computers, and everything has to be hybrid.”

“It’s not a brown, and it’s not a pink, but it’s both at the same time,” she said, stopping in front of a rug company’s stand. “It’s sort of a glazed chestnut.”

At one point, she passed a chair that was more or less identical to her ladyfinger chair, hardly blinking, except to note that originality was becoming more difficult than ever. “You always have to be one think ahead,” she said, breezing ahead to a textile display. “I see space being divided by curtains instead of having walls. Because it gives you the modularity.”

When we came to a furniture stand, Mahdavi, who has a habit of switching to French at emotional moments, stopped short.

“O.K., this color is my prediction,” she said, grabbing me by the elbow and pointing out a metal bar cart in a shade that she called, almost oxymoronically, “*mandarine au lait*.”

Like pink, she said, it was “one of the colors of the sunset.” She continued, “It’s something very current, because we’re not only thinking about our planet—we’re thinking about our universe.” I was surprised that she had confessed to being inspired by something as seemingly banal as a sunset, but the comment was made poignant by the knowledge that the most spectacular sunsets often occur on the most polluted days. For the rest of the fair, I felt as though I were wearing tinted glasses. All I could see—sofas, cushions, tables—was milky orange, pooling over the world, sticking to everything, like a melting dreamsicle. ♦



HOW TO MARKET TO ME

By River Clegg

Make sure the person in your advertisement is cool-looking. If there is more than one person in your advertisement, start over. Your ad has already confused me.

- Name your product PlayStation 4.
- Use a song that was popular during a period of my life when I was happy, such as the spring of 2005 or the summer of 2005.
- Don't sell me a product; sell me an identity. Here are some ideas for that identity: Cool Guy Who Plays by His Own Rules. That's the only one I can think of right now.
- If you're considering hiring a famous person to endorse your product, here are the celebrities I like: Robert Downey, Jr., Jennifer Lawrence, Bruno Mars, Laurence Fishburne, Ellen De-

Generes, and the man who played Puddy on "Seinfeld." (Don't tell me his name. That would ruin it.)

- My friend Matt is super cool and knowledgeable. He's always recommending some great band or movie I haven't heard of, and I like being around him. Anyway, what you should probably be doing is marketing your product to Matt. Then I'd definitely hear about it. Make sure your product is good, though, because Matt's pretty smart about these things. I think you'd really like Matt.
- Promote your product in a socially conscious way. For example, I'd be more likely to support a company that plants trees than a company that vows to burn tree after tree after tree.
- I don't enjoy Miles Davis, but I want to be seen as someone who might enjoy

Miles Davis. I hope this information is helpful.

• You know that thing I said earlier about how you should sell me an identity instead of a product? You should probably offer some sort of product, too. Like jeans. I need new jeans.

• Remember, I respect brands that speak my language—ones that let me engage with them on my own terms, allowing me to be part of the conversation. I know this because I read it in an article in *Time*.

• This one is just for companies selling cologne. Look. The reason I'm not buying your cologne is that you haven't persuaded me that I smell bad without it. You need to make me believe. Make me fear my body's natural scent; make me hate it. Do you understand? I need to be terrified of what life without your product would be like; I need to feel incomplete. That's your job. Make me feel lonely. Make me hate myself. Then I'll buy your cologne.

• Is your product a lava lamp? Because I have enough lava lamps.

• I am a strong, funny, good-looking, upbeat, easygoing, globally aware person whom others look up to and want to be near. Your ad should say something about that.

• If there's a golden rule of marketing to me, it's probably that if your product costs five dollars and is some sort of deadly laser ray I will buy it.

• The thing you've got to understand is that I grew up being marketed to, so there aren't many advertising tricks that work on me. Seriously. Ever since I was a child, companies have been telling me to buy, buy, buy—making me think, on some subconscious level, that my needs are the only ones that matter. And I believed it all. It wasn't until years later that I realized how lonely this had made me, and that mere accumulation doesn't lead to happiness. I finally understood that no company or product or advertising slogan could provide the companionship I needed. But it was too late. Decades of being told what to buy—and what to feel, and how to think—had left me numb. I carry that numbness everywhere now; I fear that it will never leave me. So, anyway. Maybe write a funny jingle about that?

• Be on Twitter, I guess. ♦

THE DRESSER

Andrew Weitz spruces up Hollywood's reluctant Zoolanders.

By Sheila Marikar



Four weeks before the Emmy Awards, Barry Jossen, the executive vice-president of A&E Studios, stood on a wooden platform at a Beverly Hills tailor shop, wearing a two-year-old Armani tuxedo that he thought fit just fine. Andrew Weitz, an intense, wiry man whom Jossen had hired to update his look, squinted at Jossen's trousers. He turned to Mario Gonzales, the tailor.

"Do the pant," Weitz ordered. "See that?" He pulled the material tighter against Jossen's shin. "If you keep it this way—" He let go of the fabric. "Eh, you're older. This"—Weitz pinched the fabric again—"hooks you up."

"Taper the pant," Gonzales said, and

bent down to ease a line of pins through the back of Jossen's right trouser leg.

Weitz wore a teal Isaia blazer with a pocket square in a lavender bandanna print (pocket squares are one of his signatures), a Gucci shirt, and white Canali chinos. Jossen had arrived in a gray polo shirt and baggy jeans.

Ten minutes and dozens of pins later, Weitz stood back. "See the difference?" he crowed. "We went a little shorter, and slimmed out your sleeve! You're probably, like, 'I can't tell the difference.'"

They turned to office clothes. Weitz and his associate, a thirty-three-year-old woman named Neda Rouhani, had amassed a pile of Brunello Cucinelli

dress shirts, on consignment from Neiman Marcus. They had to figure out whether Jossen, who is fifty-nine, and has a headful of tight salt-and-pepper curls and a soul patch, was a medium or a large. Ignoring a modesty screen, Jossen stood in the middle of the room and shrugged on a lavender striped shirt. Tugging at the buttonholes, he lamented a recent weight gain. "You could be retaining water," Weitz said, coaxing him into an aubergine cardigan and buttoning the front. Jossen looked like a schoolboy primed for an Easter-egg roll.

"Would you ever do something like this?" Weitz asked. "Purple? With your gray slacks, a pair of jeans?"

Jossen looked down, twisting his mouth. "I would feel self-conscious doing it, for some reason," he said.

"I think you look great," Weitz said. "But I always ask clients, 'How do *you* feel?' The last thing I want is for it to sit in your closet."

Jossen cocked his head. "I think it looks great, it's just not—"

Weitz finished his sentence: "You."

Los Angeles is home to hundreds of celebrity fashion stylists. They dominate the E! network, jostle for spots on "Most Powerful" lists, and have followings that rise and fall with the fortunes of their clients. Weitz, who founded his style-consulting firm, the Weitz Effect, four years ago, caters to another group: the agents, managers, and executives who make the industry run. These characters used to be largely unseen, Broadway Danny Roses lurking dimly behind the scenes in rumpled suits with mustard stains on their neckties. But now they are regulars on red carpets and on social media. These days, image is everything, even for a man whose face doesn't pay the bills.

Weitz's clients are men who sit behind desks. They include Michael Lombardo, the former HBO executive; Bruce Rosenblum, the head of Disney and ABC's business operations; Howard Gordon, "Homeland's" executive producer ("It's still half embarrassing to me," he says)—and plenty of men who aren't eager for the world to know that they need another man to help them get dressed. (Elon Musk, Tom Brady, and the agent Ari Emanuel are known

to discreetly seek his advice.) Weitz, who is forty-four, comes from their world. He spent eleven years as an agent with William Morris Endeavor before leaving to start his company. He is happy to protect his clients' privacy. "These guys don't want to be 'outed,'" he told me the first time we met, at the café inside Fred Segal, the West Hollywood boutique. "What I do isn't a common thing, yet."

Weitz is a fit six feet two, with a chinful of meticulous stubble. He likes to point out that he's a sample size. He dresses in luxury labels, primarily Italian, and rarely repeats an outfit, faithfully keeping track of what he wears. He owns forty-three pairs of eyeglasses and a Cartier wedding band of three tones—rose gold, gold, and silver. (He used to have three different wedding rings, which he rotated depending on which of his six wristwatches he had on. His wife, Stacy, is an executive at Sony Pictures Television.) He describes his aesthetic as "clean, sophisticated, a pop of conservative, edge, and just smart." He added, "If I didn't say clean, *clean*." The things he hates more than anything are wide ties, boxy suits, and dress shirts that balloon at the back.

Were Donald Trump a client, Weitz would go straight for the neckties. "That tie, which is probably made in China—it's always too long," he said. "It's always past his crotch. That's just not a good look." He is also appalled at the way the President uses Scotch tape to secure the skinny end of his tie to the wide end (as is revealed in photographs on windy days). "You're the President," Weitz said. "You just can't do that."

Weitz shops, puts outfits together, and makes house calls for clients, but he hates to be called a stylist, lest he get lumped in with the hordes opining about who wore what best on the red carpet. "For me, it's not so much about the clothes," he said. "They're just a precursor to getting the guy to where he should be." Weitz has a grander vision of his calling; he sees himself as being more in the Tim Ferriss self-help vein. His firm's slogan is "Style. Confidence. Success."

"You are your business card," he said. "If you dress like a slob, people have a propensity to think of you as lazy." Lately, Weitz has been taking this message on the speaking circuit, giving pep talks at

corporate events about how pocket squares and the right narrow trousers can affect a company's bottom line.

A few days before the meeting with the tailor, Weitz had gone to Jossen's house and excavated his closet, tossing out heaps of outdated shirts, pants, and suits. "It was a humbling experience," Jossen said. (Another client described the mandatory closet purge as "surgery—it's like having a piece of yourself cut out.") Weitz's own closet is disarmingly sparse. "Seventy-five per cent of whatever I have this season, I won't use again," he told me one summer day, when he gave me a tour.

At the tailor's, Jossen, as if trying to talk himself into Weitz's lavender vision for him, noted that, in Hollywood's golden age, every man on a movie set—the technicians, the grips—wore neat slacks and a collared shirt. A lot of the people in the industry, he said, "look like they woke up in the morning after having been out drinking all night."

After an hour in the fitting room, Jossen settled on three shirts, a pair of Joe's jeans, and a thousand-dollar Cucinelli sweater. He looked stunned. "It took me a few minutes to figure out what was happening, but, I tell you, I love this," he said.

With clients, Weitz is part bro, part nanny. He asked Jossen if he needed a snack before they moved on. (Jossen declined.) They walked a few blocks to Canali, an old Italian label that recently updated its offerings to include slim-cut blazers. Rouhani had called ahead and asked a clerk to set aside items that Weitz thought would work for Jossen.

Weitz slapped two sleek salesmen on the back. "Water, espresso, booze?" one of them asked Jossen. Pellegrino was poured. Weitz held up a blue polo shirt with a diamond pattern and unfurled a pair of olive-green jeans that looked appropriate for a fishing trip: "Would you wear this?" "I would never pick it out myself," Jossen said, peering at the jeans. When he shuffled out of the fitting room in his stocking feet, Weitz slipped a narrow cobalt-blue jacket on him. Weitz danced around, adjusting lapels, smoothing sleeves, then stepped back and declared, "I love this."

Rouhani snapped a photo with a company iPhone. "It looks so good," she said. The in-house tailor was summoned to

hem the bottom of the polo half an inch.

"Well, yeah, it looks neat," Jossen said. "When you showed it all in context, it made sense. On its own, it was just green pants."

Weitz started caring about clothes at the age of eleven, when he tried on a gray quilted jacket at a store called Boytogs and begged his mother to buy it for him. He and his brother, Richard, participated in a few local fashion shows, but Andrew had no interest in being a model. After majoring in communications in college, he moved to L.A., where his brother was working as a talent agent at I.C.M. (Richard, who is now a partner at W.M.E., represents such actors as Tina Fey and Rob Lowe.) Andrew got a job at I.C.M., too. When his brother left for a position at Endeavor, a competing agency, Weitz again ended up following him. His new post came with a more formal dress code and led to a V.I.P. discount at Hugo Boss, where a salesman initiated him into the art of mixing and matching.

As an agent, Weitz handled a number of British comedians, including Ricky Gervais, James Corden, and Stephen Merchant. (Merchant is a client of the Weitz Effect.) He was in what he calls his John Varvatos phase when a friend introduced him to Jim Khuri, a young father who had just moved to L.A. from Rochester, New York, to run his family's trading-card company. Khuri invited Weitz to the Super Bowl, and the two became close friends. Soon Weitz felt moved to take a step that few male friendships would survive: he questioned Khuri's wardrobe choices, which included a lot of baggy, logo-encrusted clothes.

"I said to him, 'You know, if you're going to live in L.A. I'd like to help you get acclimated,'" Weitz recalled. "He said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'You can't run around here dripping in Versace. You don't want to do that, dude.'" He added, "I don't want to hang out with you if you're doing that."

Chastened by this peculiar ultimatum, Khuri allowed Weitz to take him to Varvatos, Dolce & Gabbana, and, eventually, to the Beverly Hills outpost of Loro Piana, an Italian label known for its cashmere. "Now we basically *live* there," Khuri told me. "The way Andrew put together the shirts, the pants, and

shoes! I bought five different sets of that stuff, the way he wanted it to be fitted—it's not the tailor's way, it's *his* way."

After Weitz began dressing him, Khuri lost forty-two pounds. He started a real-estate business and ramped up the trading-card company. (Walmart now sells its Pokémon and baseball cards.) Khuri is convinced that imaginatively coordinated separates have changed his life. "You look at the five-year history—my net worth is up about a thousand per cent," he said.

Khuri is one of eight clients who pay Weitz a yearly retainer. (Weitz offers several types of service agreements, starting with a thousand-dollar fee for selecting a few outfits. Annual retainers for companies can run into the tens of thousands, and Weitz receives a commission—around twenty per cent—from merchants on everything he sells.) Khuri texts or calls Weitz every few days, the way a teen-age girl might check in with her best friend before a school dance. "I'll be getting ready to go to some important dinner," Khuri said. "Andrew tells me, 'Do this, this, and this.' Now I won't buy anything without him. It's kind of weird."

At Endeavor, where agents tended to work the phones in white shirts and dark pants, Weitz's plaid blazers attracted attention. Once, his boss Ari Emanuel stopped in the middle of a

staff meeting and turned to face Weitz. "What the fuck is in your pocket?" he demanded, eying the square of colored silk. Soon other agents began quietly enlisting his help in spiffing up their wardrobes. He opened a savings account under the name T.W.E. and began thinking about how he might turn his secret hobby into a business.

In 2013, when Weitz was still an agent, the men's-fashion Web site Mr. Porter asked him to star in a short video about his daily getting-dressed routine. Weitz figured that in the months between the video's filming and its release he'd decide whether to leave the agency—by then, William Morris Endeavor—and strike out on his own. But Mr. Porter posted the video ahead of schedule, and when Weitz walked into the W.M.E. office on the morning it appeared online there was snickering. The video includes shots of him showering, blow-drying his hair, and walking around his bedroom in tight black boxer briefs, before slipping loafers on over a pair of Peds. That morning, Ari Emanuel and Patrick Whitesell, W.M.E.'s co-C.E.O.s, called Weitz on speakerphone, furious.

"They asked, 'What *is* this?'" Weitz recalled. "I explained that this was not about me wanting to be a model, this was not about me wanting to be an actor. This was more about showing people that style is very powerful, it's

very personal, and it really does help your life in all aspects. I said, 'This *helps* the company.' At that time, they didn't see it the way I saw it."

Weitz continued to style men in the industry on the sly, and that summer he attended Men's Fashion Week in London, forging relationships with insiders like Dylan Jones, the editor of *British GQ* and a member of the British Fashion Council. He travelled to Israel and had what he describes as an epiphany at the Western Wall. "I told myself, 'This is who you are, and these are the gifts you have.'" The following February, he quit the agency.

One evening, I met Weitz, his brother, and his brother's teen-age son, Aidan, at an event hosted by the basketball star Blake Griffin at the Ermenegildo Zegna boutique in Beverly Hills. (Aidan wanted to wear a Kobe Bryant shirt, but Weitz nixed that.) Weitz walked around, shaking hands with the tradesmen of Rodeo Drive. He wore gray pants and a blue jacket with a crosshatch pattern, a red square in the pocket. Zegna had given him a couture jacket that afternoon. "I'm going to give it back," he said. "I don't like asking for things, but I'm a walking billboard for my clients."

Weitz ushered his group to the third floor, where his brother took a photo of him with Griffin that ended up on the Weitz Effect's Instagram feed, which has more than sixty-eight thousand followers and features Weitz making broody faces in aspirational settings (private jet, pool). On the way out, Weitz pointed to a display of workaday pink-and-blue button-downs: "There's a shirt that I've sold a *lot* of."

A sales associate overheard him and smiled. "With your clients, it's same shit, different day," he said to Weitz.

Although Weitz isn't afraid to wear something jarringly trendy himself (a belted suit, for instance), the look he sells to his clients has a certain sameness—streamlined designer sneakers, narrow pants, bright pocket squares. There are exceptions: I saw him talk a nervous businessman who'd enlisted his help dressing for a "Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" party into buying a pink shirt with pleated sleeves. (The man's girlfriend said that it reminded



her of the puffy pirate shirt from “Seinfeld.”) And when Weitz was helping Charles D. King, a producer of “Mudbound,” choose a tux for the Oscars, Weitz grilled him about whether he’d worn various garments that the two had selected during a recent shopping expedition:

Weitz: “Blue zip-up?”

King: “Yes. And the burgundy shoes for a photo shoot, that Gucci suit for the premiere—”

Weitz: “Gray Dior blazer with the hood?” (I had seen Weitz try on the same blazer at the Dior boutique earlier.)

King admitted, of the hooded blazer, “Uh, I haven’t worn it yet.”

“What are you waiting for?” Weitz demanded, making a face.

Many of Weitz’s clients have been in the business for a long time, and one of the things they want from him is a dose of youthfulness. David Hoberman, the sixty-five-year-old producer of last year’s “Beauty and the Beast,” had spent a decade as the president of Disney’s motion-picture division, and wore a suit every day. When he went out on his own, the nuances of business casual mystified him. He found himself leaving the house in jeans and an untucked shirt.

“I went from wearing a uniform to ‘Huh, now what?’” he told me. Weitz visited him in Malibu, did the closet blitz, and rolled in racks of clothes. “It was a little bit like when you decorate a house, and the decorator doesn’t want you to go in until it’s all staged for you,” Hoberman said. “He didn’t want me in the room until he laid everything out.”

An hour later, Hoberman had a new wardrobe, including an aggressively hip bomber jacket by Comme des Garçons in a green plaid. “I wanted to get outside of my comfort zone,” Hoberman said. (Not all clients are so amenable: one drew the line at a pair of pink-and-purple polka-dot shoes.)

Post-makeover, Hoberman said, “Now I’m sort of looking forward to ‘Hey, let me try that pant with those shoes.’” If Weitz has accomplished one radical thing, it might be getting straight men to use the word “pant.”

Convincing clients that it’s not prissy or indulgent to wear expensive, flattering clothes is only part of the service Weitz provides. (“You don’t want to look like a businessman on Wall Street,”

he tells clients. “You work in *entertainment*.”) He also plays the role of wisecracking big brother—a guy who knows how to navigate. Last month, Ross Zabin, an executive at Sirius XM, sought Weitz’s help with his tux for the Academy Awards (the pants got tapered). The most important advice Weitz gave him concerned party-hopping strategy. “Don’t go to Jimmy Kimmel’s after-party too early, when everyone’s still at *Vanity Fair*,” he said. “Then you’re just that guy who’s hanging out with Guillermo”—Kimmel’s goofy sidekick.

Weitz has the knack of making men take suggestions from him that they would never take from their wives. (Howard Gordon, the “Homeland” producer, said that he hired Weitz after the state of his closet “had become an issue in my marriage.”) Stacy Weitz is a petite woman with blond hair who favors no-nonsense dark dresses. “I’ve never been into fashion,” she told me. “But I know every time I go to an event with Andrew people are going to be, like, ‘What is Stacy wearing?’”

“Andrew dresses so nicely, I assumed he was gay,” Jeffrey Klarik, a TV writer and producer, told me. He and his romantic partner, David Crane, a co-creator of “Friends,” had never cared about clothes until they became Weitz Effect clients.

“Suddenly, we *looked* like we were gay,” Crane said.

A few days before the Emmy Awards, I accompanied the Weitzes to a party, and watched as Weitz worked the room, straightening collars and lapels as he went. As a married man and the father of infant twins, he can poke and pull at another man’s collar or waistband without making him feel silly. “I fixed everyone’s pocket square tonight,” he proclaimed.

Rami Malek, the “Mr. Robot” star, was lounging on a sofa, and he and Weitz slapped hands and bantered about designers (Malek: “I’ve got to be honest, Dior is like . . .” Weitz: “The shit.”) He noticed David Spade, across the room, with a friend. “I fucking dressed him, too,” Weitz said. “Not David—his friend.”

“Thank you for making everybody look better,” Malek said to Weitz, smirking as he raised his glass.

Last winter, the agent of Justin Hurwitz, who composed the score for “La La Land,” enlisted Weitz before the Oscars to make sure that his client—a young red-carpet neophyte, nominated in two categories—would look good in case he was called up to the stage. Weitz reached out to the fashion house Lanvin, which offered to dress the nominee, so Hurwitz, with a friend in tow, met Weitz at the Lanvin boutique.

“He’s new to clothes,” the friend said, as Hurwitz shrugged on a shawl-collared tux jacket. Slight, with rumpled hair and shadows under his eyes, he looked as if he’d be more comfortable in front of a keyboard than a mirror.

“How should I hold my hands when I take a picture?” he asked Weitz. “Should they be at my side? Or—” He cupped his hands over his groin, making a serious expression.

“Don’t hold them like that, unless you’re trying to hide something,” Weitz said, laughing at his own joke. He scooted behind Hurwitz and placed the younger man’s hands over the pants pockets. “Like this, or you can angle them slightly.”

There were other lessons. “When you put your jacket on, always snug it on your neck,” Weitz said. “You don’t want to be Sean Spicer.” Next: “When you’re posing for photos with people you don’t like, make sure they’re on the end, so you can crop them out.”

They settled on the shawl-collared jacket, and Weitz called for the in-house tailor to shorten the sleeves so that the shirt cuffs showed (one of his signature looks). There was talk of how much sock to show, and of the semiotic ramifications of patent-leather lace-ups versus velvet loafers versus sneakers.

Hurwitz ended up winning both Oscars, but the evening started out with a near-disaster. On the day of the awards, despite having texted photos of himself to Weitz before leaving his apartment, Hurwitz forgot the white pocket square Weitz had picked out. He made his driver turn around and go back for it.

Afterward, I asked Hurwitz whether he would continue to use Weitz, to liven up his day-to-day wardrobe. “Uh, no. I don’t think I would do that,” he said. “I wear very simple clothes.” ♦

THE STORY OF A FACE

A trans woman finds the surgery she needs to just be herself.

By Rebecca Mead

Abby Stewart sometimes thought that she was born to be a teacher. At the small college in Colorado where she was an instructor in the biology department, she enjoyed preparing lectures for business or history majors who were simply fulfilling a requirement by taking her course in anatomy and physiology. She worked hard to prove to these students that they should still care about biology, and one way she captured their attention was by describing natural phenomena that, at first glance, might seem peculiar. She revealed that clown fish—like Nemo, in the Pixar movie—are hermaphrodites, starting out as male but sometimes becoming female as they mature. And she talked about how fungi send out subterranean tentacles, which fuse with those of other fungi. When you eat a mushroom, Abby told her students, you are eating combined sex organs.

Abby wasn't much older than her students—she had recently turned thirty—and she had a playfulness that made her seem even younger. It was fun to freak the kids out a bit. But the point was to convey to them that nature was not black and white. It contained infinite shades of gray.

One afternoon last December, Abby took a walk through Muir Woods, north of San Francisco, with her mother, Bette. (Some names have been changed.) Abby wandered through the redwood groves in jeans and hiking boots, stopping to remark on a burl here or a root system there. As she and her mother chatted beneath the scented pines, the resemblance between them was striking: they had the same fair hair; the same soft, pinkish complexion; the same vivid blue eyes. But Abby, who is about six feet tall, towered above her more delicately framed mother, and bent to her in a gentle, attentive way.

The last time they had been to Muir Woods together, Bette recalled, Abby was six months old; they'd been on a family trip to the Bay Area from their home town, in the South. Abby laughed, saying that she obviously couldn't remember that day—this visit might as well be her first. But for most of the hike she was pensive. The next day, in San Francisco, she would be undergoing a seven-hour operation at the hands of Dr. Jordan Deschamps-Braly, a craniofacial surgeon who specializes in a process called facial feminization. His practice serves transgender patients like Abby, who was designated male at birth, and publicly identified as a man before she began transitioning, almost two years ago. Abby would submit to an array of surgical procedures—on her brow, chin, jaw, nose, and throat—that would leave her looking subtly altered: like her own cousin, or her sister.

The surgery would, in another sense, unwind time. It would give Abby the face that she might now have if the baby who was once carried around Muir Woods had been spared the unwelcome ravages of puberty—if testosterone had not thickened her brow, sunk her eyes deeper, and weighted her jaw. As Abby saw it, testosterone had blighted her with an Adam's apple that, no matter how long she grew her curly hair, or how soft her skin became from hormone-replacement therapy, irremediably read to a stranger as male.

Although Abby had never undergone a surgical procedure more serious than a tonsillectomy, she had not been nervous in the three months since her first consultation with Deschamps-Braly. The technicalities of the procedures fascinated her. She wished that the whole surgery could be recorded on video, and had requested that someone on the medical team take photographs. But after

she and Bette boarded a bus back to San Francisco, where they were staying in a hotel, she looked out the window at the twilight stealing over the folds of the valley, and her mood became sombre: now it really was the night before.

The bus driver, speaking over a microphone, offered the passengers a platitude: "I hope you've had a good day, and made some memories that will last a lifetime." Abby gave an ironic sigh. Her phone buzzed: it was a text from Sofia, her girlfriend of the past three years, who had just arrived at the San Francisco airport. "Tomorrow's going to go by in the blink of an eye, literally," it read. "You'll get to fall asleep and wake up the way you were supposed to be born." A more down-to-earth addendum followed: "Plus some swelling."

Abby put her phone away, and looked over at Bette. "Thank you for bringing me, Mom," she said.

"You're welcome, sweetie," Bette replied.

When Jordan Deschamps-Braly was six or seven years old, he was building a model airplane and gashed his arm open with a knife. He was rushed, screaming, to the emergency room, and his father made the unconventional suggestion that it might calm the boy to watch the surgeon stitch him up. Jordan fell quiet, captivated by the procedure. Just as some kids fixate on being firefighters or police officers, he knew from then on that, when he grew up, he wanted to wear blue scrubs and a surgical mask.

Deschamps-Braly was born in 1979, in Oklahoma, to an affluent family that had lived in Ada, a small town southeast of Oklahoma City, for generations. His grandfather had owned a cattle ranch. His parents, George and Dania, were lawyers who ran a small joint



Facial-feminization surgery reshapes the faces of patients who feel that they look excessively masculine.

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY NATALIE KRICK

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practice. Jordan, an only child, went to the local high school, and then attended the University of Oklahoma in Oklahoma City, as both an undergraduate and a medical student. Having waited for years to try surgery, Jordan, who had always liked working with his hands, found plastic surgery particularly gratifying. As a general surgeon, you might open someone's abdomen and repair his bowels or excise her colon cancer, but after you closed the patient up there was no visible trace of your work beyond a little scar—and, hopefully, a recovered patient. With plastic surgery, your artistry was the point. He applied for one of the specialty's highly competitive residencies. His backup plan was to return to school and train as an architect.

He won a fellowship in craniofacial surgery at Milwaukee Children's Hospital, in Wisconsin. He learned to treat kids with such conditions as hydrocephaly, which causes the skull to expand to an extraordinary size, and Treacher Collins syndrome, which results in drooping eyes and an unusually small chin. He worked with Arlen Denny, an eminent surgeon who had trained in France under Paul Tessier, an even more eminent surgeon. Tessier, who died in 2008,

was known as the father of craniofacial surgery. In the nineteen-sixties, he mastered such innovations as transorbital surgery—the separation of the face from the skull. He practiced the technique on cadavers: cutting the skin along the hairline from ear to ear, and then peeling the forehead away from the skull and the eye sockets.

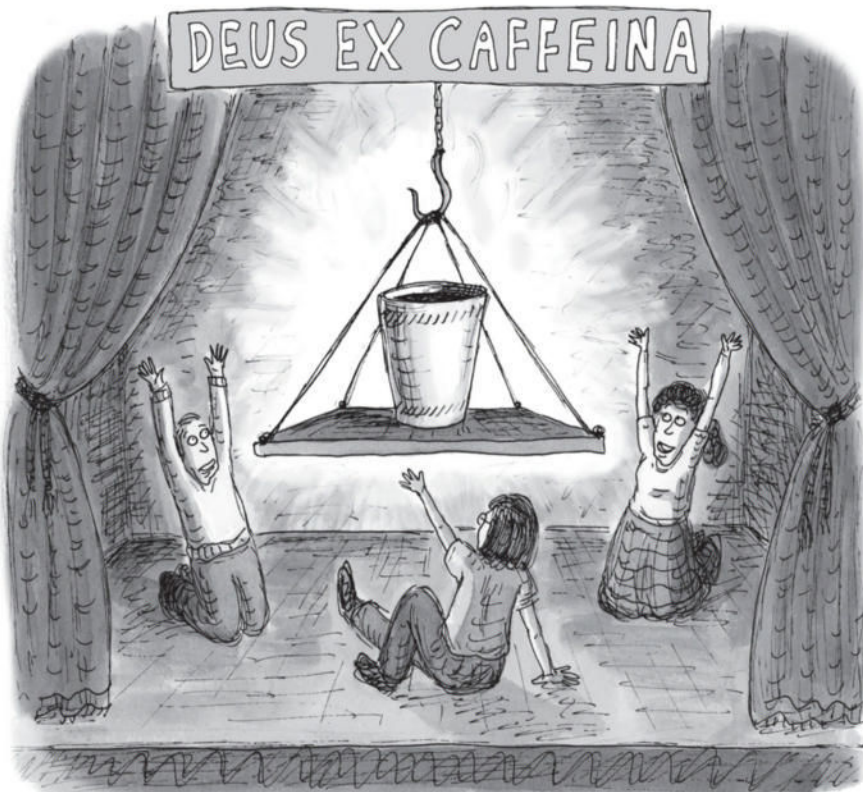
Deschamps-Braly avidly studied the history of craniofacial surgery, learning about other pioneers, including René Le Fort, who, in the late nineteenth century, categorized the types of skull fractures that might be caused by blunt trauma. Le Fort's methods would today be considered out of bounds: he tossed cadavers from the roof of a medical school in Paris to see where their faces broke on impact, or smashed their faces in with clubs and analyzed the results. Deschamps-Braly was thrilled by such commitment, which resulted in a catalogue of what are known as Le Fort fractures—the fault lines along which surgeons now deliberately break and reshape the bones of their patients.

Deschamps-Braly wrote to a surgeon in Paris who had studied under Tessier, and asked if he might train there. He was accepted, and moved to France

in 2011. He came to see that, however skilled plastic surgeons were at manipulating soft tissue, their effects would be limited if they did not also address the foundation of the face: the bones beneath the skin. During his rotations in Oklahoma, he had been fascinated by the work of oral surgeons, who performed elective surgeries not just to correct a patient's bite but to alter his or her appearance, and to correct what the patient saw as deficits—bringing forward a recessive jaw, or reducing an overly prominent one. After several months in Paris, Deschamps-Braly moved to Zurich, where he trained with an expert in corrective jaw surgery. On Thursday evenings, he returned to Paris on the bullet train, so that he could perform surgery on Friday and spend the weekend with his girlfriend, Maya—a model, and a student of political science and contemporary literature at the Sorbonne.

In 2012, Deschamps-Braly moved back to the U.S., with Maya, and the following year they married. He was working at Children's Hospital Oakland, in California, while also establishing a private practice in craniofacial surgery. One day in 2013, Deschamps-Braly learned that another surgeon trained by Tessier, Douglas Ousterhout, who was in his late seventies, was looking for someone to take over his practice, in San Francisco. Ousterhout was known for a niche specialty, facial feminization: reshaping the faces of people who felt that they looked excessively masculine. Ousterhout had transformed the faces of more than fourteen hundred trans patients, and had published extensively, in scientific journals and in a handbook for lay readers. Deschamps-Braly had never worked on a trans patient, but he was excited by the prospect. The two surgeons met for dinner and hit it off. Ousterhout agreed to delay his retirement long enough to teach Deschamps-Braly his singular techniques.

Ousterhout told Deschamps-Braly about how he came to his specialty. In 1982, a colleague approached him with a challenge. The colleague was a practitioner of what was then known as genital sex-reassignment surgery, and is now called genital gender-



confirmation surgery. At the time, the procedure was popularly regarded as the defining one for transgender patients. The colleague had performed genital surgery on a patient some years earlier, and the patient, who subsequently got breast implants, now had the body she desired. But she remained troubled by the masculine traits in her face, particularly her brow ridge. She hated it, and wore bangs to cover it up, but despite her best efforts she thought that she still had a man's face. The colleague asked Ousterhout, a highly regarded cranio-maxillofacial surgeon, if he could help.

Ousterhout had never thought much about the broad structural differences between masculine and feminine faces. When he was performing reconstructive surgery on a child whose bone plates had fused incorrectly, his aim was to give the patient's brain room to develop; when fixing a cleft palate, his goal was to insure that the child could eat and breathe and speak. The finer distinctions of gender were of little concern. But, after being presented with his colleague's surgical problem, Ousterhout went across town to the Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry, which had a renowned collection of human skulls that had been gathered, mostly from autopsies, by an orthodontist. Ousterhout spent hours there, taking measurements of the head from infancy to adulthood—observing, for example, how a masculine jaw developed nubbins at the corners, squaring the face, and noting the more pointed quality of a feminine chin.

Armed with this research, and with information from physical-anthropology textbooks, he operated on the trans patient. He did not reduce her brow ridge, which he considered to be within the bounds of feminine physiognomy, but instead added medical-grade plastic into the concavity above it, giving her a smoother, more rounded profile. The surgery, which took four hours, was aggressive. When it was done, the nurses joked darkly with the patient that the doctor must have punched her really hard. But, after the full recovery period of a month, the transformation was impressive. Minute changes in the brow—a matter of a millimetre or two—had brought about dramatic results. The patient felt that she looked pretty and



"Everybody's impressed with how you can shred incriminating documents into one long strand."

feminine: like herself, or the self she wanted to be.

Word spread in the trans community of Ousterhout's work, and a trickle of patients turned into a steady stream. He started attending conferences and gatherings for trans people, giving presentations and offering consultations. His patients invariably had means, because the procedure, unlike genital surgery, was considered cosmetic by insurers and therefore not covered by them. Most insurance companies still classify facial feminization, which can cost as much as sixty thousand dollars, as an elective surgery. A few insurance companies, such as Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, now cover some facial-feminization procedures.

Over the years, Ousterhout added several elements to his repertoire. First, he began offering nose jobs, having realized that, when patients' brows were altered, it threw their noses into new, and sometimes unflattering, relief. Many of his innovations were developed in response to patients' requests. After an airline pilot whose forehead he had feminized complained about the size of her jaw, he devised a technique for reducing the lower jaw without damaging the sensitive bundle of nerves

that extend to the chin. For those who wanted a smaller chin, Ousterhout developed a method of excising sometimes more than a centimetre of bone from the lower face.

The anthropologist Eric Plemons spent a year observing Ousterhout's practice, and recently published a book, "The Look of a Woman: Facial Feminization and the Aims of Trans-Medicine." He argues that Ousterhout not only honed a set of techniques; he also developed a theory of gender difference. Ousterhout came to believe that, for trans patients, the most meaningful surgical intervention they could undergo was not genital but facial surgery. Few people you meet see your genitals, but everyone sees your face, and instantly makes assumptions about your gender, based on a subconscious assessment of your features. (Trans men typically have an easier time signalling their gender: testosterone therapy induces the growth of a beard, or the development of male-pattern baldness, and though trans men are sometimes of smaller stature, a short man is hardly viewed as remarkable, in the way that a very tall woman can be.)

Ousterhout initially sought to bring his patients within the middle of the femininity range that he had established



"This sliver of afternoon sun ain't big enough for the both of us."

through his research into facial shapes. But as he became known as the leading authority in facial feminization—a field that was rapidly being populated by other surgeons—his surgical interventions became more extensive. He gradually came to believe that he should try to make his patients look not just like average women but like beautiful women. In part, this was to counterbalance common masculine traits that a trans patient cannot alter, such as the size of her hands. But Ousterhout's decision also had the effect of upholding certain cultural assumptions about what is beautiful or feminine. As Plemons, who is trans, writes, "*Feminine* is a term in which biological femaleness and aesthetic desirability collapse." At the very least, Ousterhout wished to enable his patients to open the door to the UPS guy in their sweatpants, without the armor of makeup or careful hair styling, and be perceived as female. But he also believed that he had the ability to give his patients a face that emulated a feminine ideal.

Not everyone in the trans community sees facial feminization as offering unalloyed benefits. "Passing" can be a fraught notion for trans people, much as it has been for people of color. For some, facial feminization is seen as bol-

stering restrictive stereotypes while stigmatizing gender nonconformity. And, given that the surgery is too expensive for most trans women, it has been criticized as perpetuating what Plemons calls "an embodied form of woman that was idealized by many but available only to a few." The sociologist Heather Laine Talley, in her 2014 book, "*Saving Face: Disfigurement and the Politics of Appearance*," has argued that "facial feminization relies on and reproduces essentialized notions about what distinguishes a male face from a female face." From this perspective, facial feminization may offer the individual who undergoes it a reprieve from prejudice, but it may also reinforce the broader oppressive structures that leave trans people disproportionately vulnerable to discrimination and violence.

The debate about the extent to which facial feminization reinforces regressive stereotypes is not limited to academics; it has also permeated popular culture. Caitlyn Jenner's acknowledgment, in 2015, of having undergone facial feminization brought unprecedented attention to the process. Laverne Cox, one of the stars of "*Orange Is the New Black*," who is also a trans activist, objects to the imposition of conventional beauty standards on trans women.

On her blog, Cox has argued, "There are many trans folks because of genetics and/or lack of material access who will never be able to embody these standards. More importantly many trans folks don't want to embody them, and we shouldn't have to to be seen as ourselves and respected as ourselves." A few years ago, Cox launched the hashtag #transisbeautiful, explaining on her blog that she wanted to "celebrate all those things that make trans folk uniquely trans." She has spoken of being grateful that, by the time she could afford facial-feminization surgery, she no longer wished to undergo it.

Trans people who do not feel inclined, or able, to wage a political battle—who just want to avoid feeling self-conscious when out in public or dismayed when looking in a mirror—may especially desire facial-feminization surgery. Gender dysphoria is the technical term for that intense feeling of not-rightness. The most recent update to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which was published in 2017, contains an important revision, stipulating that gender nonconformity should not be categorized as a mental disorder—a stigma that the trans community has long sought to counter. But the manual also indicates that an individual's distress over feelings of gender nonconformity can be classified as a disorder, which can be managed with a range of potential treatments, including therapy, hormones, and surgery. Gender dysphoria can be understood as a severe dislocation between one's inward sense of self and one's outward appearance. Many women are unhappy with their bodies—in Western consumer society, to be unhappy with some aspect of your body might almost be thought of as a normative condition of womanhood. But hating your thighs is not the same as feeling that your thighs do not belong to you.

Trans people can experience dysphoria about more than just their faces; they can detest their shoulders, or their arms, or their genitals. Some of Ousterhout's patients had already undergone genital surgery; others planned to have it afterward. But many of his patients felt that facial surgery was enough. And, for all his patients, having more feminine faces meant that

they were less likely to find themselves the focus of invasive, prurient interest, from strangers or even from friends, about the state of their genitalia. This deeply personal matter would more easily remain private. It would be nobody's business but theirs, and their intimate partners'.

Some of Ousterhout's patients came back for multiple interventions. His very first trans patient, from 1982, returned at one point to have a cleft in her chin removed: she considered it to be another deformity that read as masculine, like Tom Brady's. The final procedure that Ousterhout performed before retiring was a second reduction of her Adam's apple. Ousterhout liked to listen to a classical radio station as he operated, and as he was finishing the procedure his favorite piece of music, Wagner's "The Flight of the Valkyries," came on—an auspicious conclusion to his surgical career. The patient, who is now approaching seventy, intends, upon her death, to donate her skull to Jordan Deschamps-Braly.

Abby Stewart first called Deschamps-Braly's office last fall, and, when she was told that a surgical appointment had opened up for later in the year, she flew from Denver to San Francisco for a consultation. They met at his office, in an Art Deco tower close to Union Square. On the window ledge behind his desk, Deschamps-Braly keeps a model of a skull that delineates, with bronze rods, the proportions of the golden ratio. Unlike many surgeons, Deschamps-Braly does not conduct consultations on Skype, insisting that only by seeing and touching a patient's face can he offer a proper assessment. Nor does he show before-and-after images on his Web site, feeling that they betray patients' privacy. Deschamps-Braly was not the first surgeon Abby had visited, but she felt confident in his manner, and also in his surgical recommendations. Deschamps-Braly liked Abby, too—he found her personable, admired her intelligence, and knew that her background in science would give her a realistic understanding of what was possible. He felt that it was as important for him to choose his patients as for them to choose him.

Abby had been on hormones for

more than a year by the time she visited Deschamps-Braly, and their effects had been profound. Not only had her skin softened and her cheeks filled out; she had developed breasts, and her hips had widened. For many years, Abby had been somewhat overweight and out of shape, but after she moved to Colorado, in 2014, she became a frequent hiker and rock climber. Getting to know other women who enjoyed bouldering had helped her come to feel that there was a model of femininity to which she could comfortably conform: strong, athletic, rangy.

Despite the physical changes wrought by the hormones, Abby continued to suffer from a profound self-consciousness about her face. She felt that when she was seen from the front she looked persuasively feminine, and even striking, with abundant hair that framed her face, and wide-set eyes. But when she turned her head she looked far more masculine: the bossing of her brow showed in profile, as did the length of her jaw. She was so conscious of her Adam's apple that she tucked her chin down, to conceal it, and refrained from turning her head, looking to the side with only her eyes. With her dipped head and her inhibited range of motion, her mannerisms became those of a demure Victorian.

Abby's self-consciousness in the company of others was nothing compared

with the unhappiness she felt when faced with her own reflection. Whenever she passed a mirror, she saw the ghost of her former self, and it appalled her. Though Ousterhout had developed his procedures on the premise that his trans patients wished to move through the world without attracting unwelcome notice, Abby's desire to undergo the process was more interior. The person whose reaction to her face she most wanted to change was herself.

Abby was not among those trans people who knew from early childhood that their gender identity did not line up with the gender they'd been assigned at birth. As a child, she was aware only that something was off. She was a shy kid, and for a long time she had a stammer, but she was an excellent student. Although she lived in a conservative part of the South, her parents were relatively liberal, and her childhood was quite sheltered. When she was taunted in middle school with the label of "gay"—then the all-purpose slur for any form of gender nonconformity—she knew only that the word meant "happy."

When Abby eventually discovered what "gay" meant, she knew that it did not apply to her. Yes, she was shy and emotional, attributes that are not stereotypically masculine, but she was definitely attracted to women. Her interest



"I'll need to see some I.D. for the Claritin."

in them had an additional dimension, though. When she played video games, she often chose a female avatar. She wasn't alone in doing that—boys she knew also did it, because it was more fun to watch a virtual figure in a body-suit—but later she recognized that her motivation was different. She really wanted to *be* the girl. Bette, Abby's mother, later racked her brain, trying to find clues she had missed about Abby's gender identity, but she came up blank. She knew only that she had an unusually sensitive and intuitive child. Whereas Abby's younger brother came home from school and talked about his day for just a few minutes, Abby sat down with Bette for an hour or two every night, and shared all sorts of things. What a beautiful young man, Bette thought: one day, he is going to make some woman very happy, because he thinks like a woman.

Abby went to college in the Midwest, where she fell in with a group of progressive students, and joined campaigns for L.G.B.T.Q. rights. In her sophomore year, she had a relationship with a female student. She felt that many of her peers secretly questioned the romance, and were waiting for her to come out as gay. She resented the expectation, while feeling uncomfortable about why the suggestion made her so uncomfortable. Abby forestalled a reckoning, telling herself that, for many young adults, feeling uncomfortable with one's body was just part of life.

After graduating from college, she began a Ph.D. program in biology, but found that laboring alone in a laboratory was not for her. She completed a master's degree, and eventually moved to Colorado, both to seek out teaching work and to have the space to figure out her identity. Many trans women go through a masculinization phase before coming out as trans—sometimes by joining the military, sometimes by bulking up through exercise—in the vain hope that, by embracing an extreme of masculinity, they will find relief from the pressing sense of not-rightness. Abby didn't do this, exactly, but she did become fitter and healthier. She met Sofia, a college student studying math, through rock climbing, and in many ways she felt better about herself than she had in years. But the things that

ESSAY ON "AN ESSAY CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING"

John Locke says children don't understand elapsed time,
and when I was a girl it was true
and it remains true—

It's been three hundred years and still my feelings for Locke
must pass unrequited.
I keep his book in my satchel

with other pleasures—
lipstick, Ricola, matches, binder clips, and a tiny bar of soap
stolen from the Renaissance Inn

where I sometimes cheat on Locke with another man.
At least objects endure—
see how my old sofa holds up!

Locke would look pretty good lying here
with his long face, his furrowed brow and center part,
he who too quickly flourished

and outraced this crowded place.
La duration, I said, trying to roll my "r"
when some new French friends asked

were going well in her life made starker
the things that were not.

Abby had begun to find a framework for understanding her identity, in part because of the emergence of trans celebrities. And on the Internet trans people chronicled their transitions or posted videos about their personal histories. For Abby, it was empowering to discover that she was not alone with these thoughts. Finally, she mustered the wherewithal to acknowledge to herself that she was trans. One Saturday morning in February, 2016, she wrote a twelve-page entry in her journal, and that evening she gave it to Sofia, who read it in bed, with Abby anxiously curled at her side. When Sofia finished it, she told Abby that she loved her, and would support her.

Abby was the kind of person who, once she put her mind to something, was all in. In April, she began hormone therapy. The first effects were mental: she felt a remarkable clearing of the mind. (Other trans women describe a sense of relief that comes from eliminating their masculine sex drive, which had previously interrupted their

thoughts like a car alarm that couldn't be shut off.) Abby's skin became more vulnerable to bruising. She was thrilled to see the muscles of her back melt away, revealing the sculptural plates of a woman's scapula.

In the summer of 2016, she went home to see her parents. When she announced that she had something to tell them, Bette thought that Abby was going to tell them she was gay. (Abby later noted, dryly, "I am.") When Bette heard that Abby was trans, she went through a period of mourning, and she worried about Abby's safety and happiness, especially after she read of high rates of suicide among trans people. But, the more reading that Bette did, the more she became convinced that the statistics were largely the result of trans people being marginalized by their communities, or rejected by their families. Bette made every effort to understand her child, and, if out of habit she sometimes referred to Abby by the masculine pronoun, she was contrite, and was forgiven.

In the fall of 2016, Abby legally changed her name. Early in her tran-

what I'd been thinking about.
John Locke et la duration.
They thought I said *l'adoration*,

which is also true.
Turns out *duration* is not a French word,
no matter how badly I pronounce it.

The correct term is *la durée*,
another word I mispronounce
though once I passed a lovely *durée*

riding my rented Vélib' from the Seine
to the Sacré-Coeur,
where had I planned in advance

I could have spent the night in adoration.
Instead I only leaned my bike against the church
and looked out across the sea of human hours.

—Catherine Barnett

sition, she experimented with wearing makeup and dresses—and she immortalized her first blowout on Instagram—but she preferred not to put on lipstick and foundation, and was most at ease in jeans or workout clothes. She transitioned at work when the new semester started, in January, 2017, and was grateful that the institution was supportive. She also felt that she should be a role model for students who might be questioning their own gender identity. She accepted this as a responsibility to her community, but it was a lot to take on while she was relearning how to move through the world: how to dress, how to carry herself, how to modulate her voice.

By the summer of 2017, Abby had crossed an invisible line, and most new people she met correctly gauged her gender, calling her “Ma’am” or “Miss.” It was exhilarating to go into a restaurant with Sofia and hear the maître d’ address them as “ladies.” Anxiety over which public bathroom to use—the subject of legal victories during the Presidency of Barack Obama, and of disheartening reversals during the Pres-

idency of Donald Trump—abated with time. But Abby remained intensely pained by the vestiges of masculinity in her face. She scrutinized her appearance for changes wrought by estrogen with the obsessive focus of a teen-ager preparing for a date. In many ways, she *felt* like a teen-ager—as if she were again in the throes of puberty, though this time on her own terms.

For Abby, transitioning medically was accompanied by some sorrowful choices. She loved children, and had always wanted to have her own. The hormones she was taking would cause irreversible sterility, and she had opted not to freeze and store sperm, as some trans women do, because the long-term cost seemed prohibitive. She believed that she might eventually adopt a child, but when she thought about the fact that she would never experience pregnancy she felt a great sense of loss. But, she decided, if she could not give birth to a child, she could engineer her own rebirth.

About a week before Abby underwent facial-feminization surgery, she experienced one of those dreams that stay with you long after waking, like a

prophecy. In it, Sofia sketched a portrait of Abby, and held up the finished work. The woman in the image was extremely feminine, like a model, and Abby felt a jolt of recognition. She thought, That’s me.

Deschamps-Braly performs surgery three days a week, and spends the remaining two days on consultations and post-op care. In his very limited spare time, he likes to visit the racing track, to drive his Porsche. He enjoys the speed, but what he loves most is the sense of control—of mastering the interplay of acceleration and turning. Although racing is stressful, he finds it oddly relaxing. As in surgery, you have to contend with many moving pieces, and execute each motion smoothly and without interruption.

On the morning of Abby’s surgery, Deschamps-Braly drove from his home, which is close to his office, to the California Pacific Medical Center’s Davies Campus, between Lower Haight and the Castro. He arrived just before seven. Abby was already there, on a gurney, in a violet-colored medical gown, her hair brushed back from her face. Deschamps-Braly was dressed more like an artist than like a doctor, wearing a chunky marled-wool cardigan, narrow black jeans, and pointy black shoes with silver buckles, his curly dark hair askew. He chooses not to wear a suit, believing that it could be intimidating to patients. He carries a Prada briefcase.

Deschamps-Braly stood next to Abby on the gurney, and stroked her arm. He assured her that, once they entered the operating room, she would fall asleep quickly, and rouse seven or eight hours later without any sense of time having passed. “Easy-peasy, like falling off a log,” he said, adding that the first stage of recovery “shouldn’t be painful.” Because of swelling, he noted, “it will be horribly uncomfortable, but not much pain.”

He asked if she had any musical requests before she went under. Tupac, Abby said. Any particular Tupac song? he asked. That was a joke, she said. In the event, the Beatles were singing “Here Comes the Sun” when Abby was wheeled into the operating room. On the wall, a lightboard displayed her X-rays, and several other images. There were two



professionally lit photographs of Abby, one from the front and one in profile, which looked like unusually glamorous mug shots. (They had been taken in Deschamps-Braly's office.) Next to them were the same images, slightly altered with Photoshop, to show what Abby should look like post-op. There were also schematic diagrams indicating what surgical alterations Deschamps-Braly needed to make: a centimetre off her chin, two millimetres off her nose.

Deschamps-Braly, who by now was wearing blue scrubs and maroon Crocs, bent toward Abby and whispered in her ear as the anesthesiologist, Caroline Dejean, put her to sleep, and the others on the medical team readied surgical implements and counted screws and wires.

A physician's assistant, Zhanna Byalaya, lifted Abby's head and placed it gently on a silicone ring, like a pillow. Abby's statuesque shoulders were bared, and she looked like a funerary memorial of herself. To prepare her face for surgery, Deschamps-Braly razored away

a band of her hair. An adrenaline solution was injected along the hairline, to minimize bleeding, and her face was swabbed with the disinfectant Betadine, which gave her features an orange glow. With a few sutures, Deschamps-Braly sewed Abby's eyelids shut, to insure that her eyes remained moist and protected.

Deschamps-Braly rolled up to the gurney on his preferred stool, which was labelled "DR. D'S THRONE" and marked with a skull-and-crossbones sticker. (Apparently, it's hard to find images of skulls alone.) The first procedure to be performed on Abby was a reduction of her Adam's apple. Deschamps-Braly made a small incision just under Abby's chin, to minimize the visibility of the inevitable scar, then pulled the skin apart to make her voice box visible. He scraped away at the larynx with his instruments, but after a while things got tricky: the cartilage had hardened into bone. "I don't think we can go any further without putting her voice at risk," he said, closing up the incision. (Deschamps-

Braly has found that trans men are much less concerned with acquiring an Adam's apple than trans women are with getting rid of one. Nevertheless, he and Ousterhout jointly developed a procedure for building a new Adam's apple for trans men. In a detail that even a Hollywood scriptwriter might deem too much, it is made from cartilage extracted from the patient's rib.)

Around half past eight, Deschamps-Braly moved on to Abby's forehead. In a single deft movement with a scalpel, he sliced from the middle of her hairline to above her right ear. He repeated this unzipping motion on the left side. Then, working along the incision, he separated the skin and the subcutaneous layer of her forehead from her skull and peeled it toward her nose, as if he were removing the rubbery skin of a mango from the yellow flesh inside. Blood pooled at Abby's ears, and it was suctioned away. As Deschamps-Braly folded the loosened skin forward, over her closed eyes, he could see the bony contours of Abby's brow, and the bossing above her eyes.

The mood in the operating room was upbeat—intense and focussed but also informal. Deschamps-Braly and Dejean talked about upcoming vacation plans. (He was headed to Paris, she was going to New York City.) When he operates on children, as he does about three times a month, there is a greater sense of urgency: their small bodies cannot easily handle a considerable loss of blood, and it's important to finish surgery quickly. With an operation like Abby's, there is a different pressure—that of achieving excellent craftsmanship.

Once Abby's brow had been exposed, at about 9 A.M., Deschamps-Braly began reducing her eye socket, the top of which was exposed to the air, with the top of her eyeballs visible. The procedure, for which he used a small drill, would give Abby more open, less hooded eyes. Deschamps-Braly got up to check the diagrams on the lightboard, then returned and used the same drill to burr away the upper part of her forehead, above and around the bony protrusion that covered her sinus cavities and gave her brow a distinctive masculine ridge.

Some surgeons prefer to reduce the forehead only by burring it, but Deschamps-Braly, like Ousterhout be-

fore him, is committed to procedures that yield more dramatic results—drama, in the context of facial feminization, being measured in millimetres, or in fractions thereof. Deschamps-Braly marked the problem area, six centimetres by four centimetres, and, using a reciprocating saw, he sliced the piece of brow bone off, placing it on a side table. In a few minutes, he would reshape the bone and then reattach it. For the moment, though, he resumed burring her forehead bone, grinding certain areas until they were only a millimetre thick. To examine his handiwork, he gently restored the skin of Abby's forehead to its proper place, smoothing it down with his hand to see whether the more rounded shape was emerging. "It's better," he said.

Deschamps-Braly then turned to the brow bone on his side table. It was the color of raw squid. In some cases, the piece could be restored intact, but angled in a way that produced a flatter profile. Abby's brow was quite prominent, however, so Deschamps-Braly cut the bone into four pieces, with the plan of reconnecting them into a more refined shape. It was important that the edges be carefully aligned. When operating on the skulls of children, he could be less precise: young bodies easily generate more bone, filling in minute gaps left by a surgeon. But with adult patients Deschamps-Braly aimed for something closer to marquetry. When he had shaped the four pieces to his satisfaction, he joined them with stainless-steel wires, then placed the reconfigured object back on Abby's brow. He reconnected it swiftly to her skull with the twisting of more wires.

It was now ten-thirty. Deschamps-Braly began work on a scalp advancement—bringing Abby's hairline forward by five millimetres. He loosened her scalp from her skull, exposing the front part of her head. Abby's skull, a vulnerable, bloody orb, looked like the head of a newborn. With three tiny sutures, Deschamps-Braly reattached the scalp, moved slightly forward, to her skull. Having folded Abby's forehead back up, so that her face was visible again, he sliced a ribbon of flesh off the top of her brow, then stitched along her hairline, rejoining the scalp and the forehead.

He left the operating room for a

break in the cafeteria, where he had a Coke and some peanut-butter crackers. Byalaya washed blood and bone dust from Abby's hair, braided it, and wrapped it in a towel, as if they were at a luxury spa.

When Deschamps-Braly returned to the operating room, he began work on Abby's jaw and chin. He cut a trench inside her mouth where her cheek joined her gum, avoiding the bundle of nerves, like electrical cables in a basement, that supplied sensation to her chin. Inserting the reciprocating saw through this passageway, he burred away Abby's jawbone. Then, inserting a drill through an incision under her jawline, Deschamps-Braly cut off the angular corners at the rear of her jaw.

Deschamps-Braly always sought to get a patient's face within range of what he had determined, based on Ousterhout's research, to be the feminine ideal. The hairline and the brow ridge, Deschamps-Braly felt, should be five to six centimetres apart; the eyebrows should be about sixty-five millimetres from the tip of the nose; the nasal septum should be about fifteen millimetres from the upper lip. (In the typical resting female face, more of the upper teeth are exposed than in a resting male face.) Deschamps-Braly wanted the distance from the tips of Abby's incisors to the base of her chin to be about forty millimetres, which meant that he needed to reduce the length of her lower face by about a cen-



timetre. He would also bring her chin forward by six millimetres, to create the desired harmony. Byalaya pulled down the skin of Abby's lower face, and Deschamps-Braly used a sterilized pencil to draw a T shape onto the bone of her chin. Then he began cutting along his pencil marks.

There was a burning smell as Deschamps-Braly extracted a thick crescent of bone and set it aside. Abby had asked to keep it. He set about restor-

ing her chin with a custom-measured titanium plate, cinching the bone together around the excision to close up the gap and thus recontour the chin's shape. The chin finished, Deschamps-Braly took another short break, then returned to do the most pedestrian procedure, a rhinoplasty, which he started at about 1:30 P.M.

The nose job was also, arguably, the most purely aesthetic intervention that Deschamps-Braly was making. A well-shaped nose might be a desirable thing in a woman, or a man, but it is not necessarily a marker of gender. Deschamps-Braly, however, had no qualms about admitting that, though his official brief was to make his patients look more feminine, his goal was also to make them look prettier. In addition to the techniques he had learned from Ousterhout, he had added one of his own: fat injections to the cheeks, which give a fuller, more youthful aspect to the face. In recent decades, fat injections have been widely adopted by conventional cosmetic surgeons, as a way of making patients look younger without giving them the stretched appearance that can result from a face-lift. In trans patients of any age, fat injections can help feminize the face—a feminine face is typically less chiselled than a masculine one. They can also beautify a patient, giving her a plumped, dewy look.

Abby had decided against fat injections. With Sofia, she had spent long hours talking about stereotypes of femininity, and she was ambivalent about her desire to conform to them to the extent that she did. She thought that conventional ideas of beauty were oppressive to women and men alike. In the end, she decided to alter only the features over which she experienced dysphoria, and to forgo interventions that were simply for the sake of aesthetics. Her cheeks did not bother her, so there was no need for added fat. But Deschamps-Braly had convinced her that a rhinoplasty would harmonize the adjustments to the jaw, the chin, and the forehead. She wasn't happy that getting a nose job might be seen as an expression of vanity. For Abby, a major reason for wishing to look decisively feminine was a desire for personal safety: she was aware that violence and hostility against

trans people remained prevalent. She thought that there was a strange cultural dichotomy at work: individuals were celebrated for self-actualization but judged superficial if they crossed some imperceptible threshold.

After Deschamps-Braly made an incision between Abby's nostrils and peeled back her skin to reveal the structure of her nose, Byalaya handed him a small hammer, and he chipped away. "Can I get a ruler?" he asked. Having trimmed off a piece of cartilage, he slid it back into her nose, to the side of her septum. In case she didn't like the results of the rhinoplasty, another surgeon could use the cartilage for a restoration. It was like keeping a spare tire in the trunk.

Deschamps-Braly finished up just before three in the afternoon, snapping off his surgical bib as the Beatles sang "With a Little Help from My Friends." He removed the sutures from Abby's eyes, and crouched beside the gurney to survey her profile. Abby's face would soon be largely covered up, and would remain that way for the next week: plaster would be put over her nose, and her forehead and jaw would be wrapped in compression bandages. But for a moment, before the worst of the swelling set in, Deschamps-Braly could see the face that Abby was going to have: a smooth forehead, a delicate chin, an aquiline nose.

He left the surgical theatre and de-

scended to the ground floor, where Bette and Sofia awaited. "Nothing unusual happened," he reported.

In Deschamps-Braly's experience, patients who underwent facial feminization often felt an almost immediate relief from dysphoria. When the plaster and bandages came off, a week after surgery, they recognized their new faces as themselves. What varied was the patients' self-image. Deschamps-Braly had some patients who had no desire to hide their trans-ness, including Adrian Roberts, a d.j. and party host who identifies as nonbinary trans-feminine, and who goes by the pronoun "they." Roberts wanted to be seen as more femme, but not as female. Deschamps-Braly gave Roberts a different forehead, nose, and chin, and fat injections. Roberts said, "More than your body, your face is what makes you *you*." Another patient, Autumn Trafficante, a programmer and a trans activist, viewed Deschamps-Braly as an artist, and told him that he should do whatever he thought best with her face. Trafficante had previously presented as a model-handsome man, with a scruff of beard and a ripped torso. When Deschamps-Braly handed her a mirror, a week after surgery, she broke down in tears of relief: for the first time, she registered her face as female. On her Instagram account, Trafficante offered a visual history of her transition, cul-

minating in sloe-eyed glamour shots of herself in lingerie.

Abby was fascinated by images like these, but she was more modest in temperament. Her Instagram account, which she kept private, showed her and Sofia hiking or climbing in the mountains, ruddy and grinning in the sunlight. When she scrolled back to look at herself in 2015, before she had begun to transition, she could see that the changes wrought by the hormones alone were remarkable. But she had sought facial-feminization surgery in order to stop thinking about her gender, not to draw attention to it.

Abby was well versed in gender theory, and could talk at length about the ways in which gender identity is culturally constructed. She knew that trans individuals occupied contested ground, and that there were people who would argue that, for three decades, she had enjoyed the benefit of male privilege. She questioned, though, what privilege lay in having been obliged to conform to a gender expression she loathed and rebuked. Abby was thoughtful and sincere in her commitment to feminism and intersectionality—the idea that gender issues cannot be divorced from matters of class, race, and disability—and she wanted to be helpful to other trans people who might not have had the same educational and cultural advantages she'd had. She had even written a guide about the practical aspects of transitioning, such as changing your name and updating legal documents, for others who might be following a similar path. She was determined to be an activist and an ally in the trans community. She also wanted to just be herself.

When Abby arrived at the hospital for her surgery, she had an experience that underscored the urgency of her need. She was dressed in jeans and a plaid shirt, knowing that she would soon be changing into a surgical gown, and she wasn't carrying a handbag. As instructed, she wore no makeup or jewelry, and had her hair tied back. As she entered the building and rode the elevator to the surgical ward, two hospital employees separately referred to her as "Sir"—something that had not happened to her for months. At the time, she was too focussed on the coming operation to pay much attention, but later she reflected



on the occurrence. Having stripped away all the clues that she usually provided to indicate how she wanted to be perceived, she was left with bare physical characteristics that read as male. When you take everything else away, you have just your face. That, for her, confirmed that she had made the right choice.

After Abby's surgery, she was moved to a private room. She felt profoundly weak, and when nurses encouraged her to stand she could hardly rise to her feet. She could not speak above a whisper, and she was grateful that Sofia so intuitively responded to her needs, knowing when she needed to rest, and coaxing her to drink milk from a straw. It was spooky how in synch they were.

Little of Abby's face was visible, and what was visible was very swollen, but whenever Sofia or Bette held up a mirror, or took a photo, Abby could see that her eyes were already different: wider, more open. But Abby was not concentrating on her face; she was concentrating on her recovery. She was in a great deal of discomfort—she felt pressure on her forehead, and numbness in her scalp and jaw. She couldn't shower, or breathe through her nose. When she was released from the hospital, the next afternoon, and went back to her hotel, she was too self-conscious to go far from her room.

Eight days after the surgery, she returned to Deschamps-Braly's office to have the plaster and bandages removed: the "great unveiling," as he called it. She lay on a reclining medical chair in his consulting room, and he carefully removed the dressing. Although Abby had heard the stories of patients who were emotionally overwhelmed at the sight of their new faces, that was not her experience. For her, it was an anticlimax. She was in survival mode: she just wanted to heal, and to get a good night's sleep again. She had a moment of seeing herself and thinking, That's the new me, but mostly she wanted to know when she could take her next pain pill.

Abby was relieved when she was told that she could go home to Colorado. Deschamps-Braly gave her a document to take to the airport, which explained why she no longer looked like the photograph on her driver's license. He also gave her a transparent plastic container covered with a biohazard sticker and a



"Bodega-to-table, actually."

word scrawled with a Sharpie: "BONES."

In mid-January, after six weeks of recuperating at home, Abby returned to teaching. At first, she was embarrassed about the lingering puffiness around her jawline and on her forehead, although the latter, especially, was barely noticeable to the casual observer. Before the surgery, she had told a few close colleagues exactly what she would be doing over the break, but mostly she used a phrase that Sofia had come up with: she had undergone a corrective surgery.

Before the operation, Sofia had been worried about Abby's coming transformation, fearing that she might no longer recognize the face she had fallen in love with. And Abby's face *had* changed, and would change more over the next six months, which is how long Deschamps-Braly had told her it would take for everything to settle. Abby's jaw was less angular, her chin more tapered. Her eyebrows arched above expressive eyes, and her brow, despite the residual puffiness, was smooth. In some ways, she looked like an entirely different person, but she was also instantly recognizable: she had the same ready smile, and radiated the same quiet intelligence. Sofia said that she had fallen in love with Abby's old face, and she was in love with Abby's new face. But what she meant was that she was in love with Abby.

Abby herself was still adjusting to

life with her reborn face. She was not spending much time outdoors, having been told to avoid the sun as she healed. She felt sluggish, and was eager to get back to exercising. But her facial dysphoria had vanished. The reduction of her Adam's apple was such a relief—she had immediately stopped tucking her chin down and had gone back to turning her head. She would run her hand over her throat and think, Holy crap, it's gone. In the months before the operation, she had become anxious and withdrawn, and had avoided making eye contact when she was out and about. Now she was back to striking up conversations with strangers in the grocery store. And whenever she glimpsed herself in the mirror she no longer saw the ghost of her former self.

Abby kept the transparent container in a drawer in her bedroom. She had yet to figure out exactly what to do with the pieces of bone that Deschamps-Braly had removed, and thought that she might have them turned into jewelry. Perhaps she'd put the fragments in a vial, and wear it on a chain around her neck. The largest piece was the section that he had carved so deftly from her chin. It was the shape of a waxing moon—nature's perfect, elegant curve. When Abby held it in her hand, it already looked like a piece of jewelry: precious, beautiful, superfluous. ♦

ANTISOCIAL MEDIA

Reddit, free speech, and the struggle to detoxify the Internet.

By Andrew Marantz

Which Web sites get the most traffic? According to the ranking service Alexa, the top three sites in the United States, as of this writing, are Google, YouTube, and Facebook. (Porn, somewhat hearteningly, doesn't crack the top ten.) The rankings don't reflect everything—the dark Web, the nouveau-riche recluses harvesting bitcoin—but, for the most part, people online go where you'd expect them to go. The only truly surprising entry, in fourth place, is Reddit, whose astronomical popularity seems at odds with the fact that many Americans have only vaguely heard of the site and have no real understanding of what it is. A link aggregator? A microblogging platform? A social network?

To its devotees, Reddit feels proudly untamed, one of the last Internet giants to resist homogeneity. Most Reddit pages have a throwback aesthetic, with a few crudely designed graphics and a tangle of text: an original post, comments on the post, responses to the comments, responses to the responses. That's pretty much it. Reddit is made up of more than a million individual communities, or subreddits, some of which have three subscribers, some twenty million. Every subreddit is devoted to a specific kind of content, ranging from vital to trivial: r/News, r/Politics, r/Trees (for marijuana enthusiasts), r/Marijuana-Enthusiasts (for tree enthusiasts), r/MildlyInteresting (“for photos that are, you know, mildly interesting”). Some people end up on Reddit by accident, find it baffling, and never visit again. But people who do use it—reditors, as they're called—often use it all day long, to the near-exclusion of anything else. “For a while, we called ourselves the front page of the Inter-

net,” Steve Huffman, Reddit's C.E.O., said recently. “These days, I tend to say that we're a place for open and honest conversations—‘open and honest’ meaning authentic, meaning messy, meaning the best and worst and realest and weirdest parts of humanity.”

On November 23, 2016, shortly after President Trump's election, Huffman was at his desk, in San Francisco, perusing the site. It was the day before Thanksgiving. Reddit's administrators had just deleted a subreddit called r/Pizzagate, a forum for people who believed that high-ranking staffers of Hillary Clinton's Presidential campaign, and possibly Clinton herself, were trafficking child sex slaves. The evidence, as extensive as it was unpersuasive, included satanic rituals, a map printed on a handkerchief, and an elaborate code involving the words “cheese” and “pizza.” In only fifteen days of existence, the Pizzagate subreddit had attracted twenty thousand subscribers. Now, in its place, was a scrubbed white page with the message “This community has been banned.”

The reason for the ban, according to Reddit's administrators, was not the beliefs of people on the subreddit, but the way they'd behaved—specifically, their insistence on publishing their enemies' private phone numbers and addresses, a clear violation of Reddit's rules. The conspiracy theorists, in turn, claimed that they'd been banned because Reddit administrators were part of the conspiracy. (Less than two weeks after Pizzagate was banned, a man fired a semiautomatic rifle inside a D.C. pizzeria called Comet Ping Pong, in an attempt to “self-investigate” claims that the restaurant's basement was a dungeon full of kidnapped children. Comet Ping Pong does not have a basement.)

Some of the conspiracy theorists left Reddit and reunited on Voat, a site made by and for the users that Reddit sloughs off. (Many social networks have such Bizarro networks, which brand themselves as strongholds of free speech and in practice are often used for hate speech. People banned from Twitter end up on Gab; people banned from Patreon end up on Hatreon.) Other Pizzagaters stayed and regrouped on r/The_Donald, a popular pro-Trump subreddit. Throughout the Presidential campaign, The_Donald was a hive of Trump boosterism. By this time, it had become a hermetic subculture, full of inside jokes and ugly rhetoric. The community's most frequent commenters, like the man they'd helped propel to the Presidency, were experts at testing boundaries. Within minutes, they started to express their outrage that Pizzagate had been deleted.

Redditors are pseudonymous, and their pseudonyms are sometimes prefaced by “u,” for “username.” Huffman's is Spez. As he scanned The_Donald, he noticed that hundreds of the most popular comments were about him:

“fuck u/spez”

“u/spez is complicit in the coverup”

“u/spez supports CHILD RAPE”

One commenter simply wrote “u/SPEZ IS A CUCK,” in bold type, a hundred and ten times in a row.

Huffman, alone at his computer, wondered whether to respond. “I consider myself a troll at heart,” he said later. “Making people bristle, being a little outrageous in order to add some spice to life—I get that. I've done that.” Privately, Huffman imagined The_Donald as a misguided teen-ager who wouldn't stop misbehaving. “If your little brother flicks your ear, maybe you ignore it,” he said. “If he flicks your ear a hundred times, or punches you,



"The Internet started as a bastion for free expression," a former Reddit C.E.O. wrote. These days, "the trolls are winning."

ILLUSTRATION BY JAVIER JAÉN

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"He's unbeatable on carpet."

then maybe you give him a little smack to show you're paying attention."

Although redditors didn't yet know it, Huffman could edit any part of the site. He wrote a script that would automatically replace his username with those of The_Donald's most prominent members, directing the insults back at the insulters in real time: in one comment, "Fuck u/Specz" became "Fuck u/Trumpshaker"; in another, "Fuck u/Specz" became "Fuck u/MAGAdocious."

The_Donald's users saw what was happening, and they reacted by spinning a conspiracy theory that, in this case, turned out to be true.

"Manipulating the words of your users is fucked," a commenter wrote.

"Even Facebook and Twitter haven't stooped this low."

"Trust nothing."

The incident became known as Speczgiving, and it's still invoked, internally and externally, as a paradigmatic example of tech-executive overreach. Social-media platforms must do something to rein in their users, the consensus goes, but not *that*.

Huffman can no longer edit the site indiscriminately, but his actions laid bare a fact that most social-media companies go to great lengths to conceal—that, no matter how neutral a platform may seem, there's always a person behind the curtain. "I fucked up," Huffman wrote in an apology the following week. "More than anything, I want Reddit to heal, and I want our country to heal." Implicit in his apology was a set of questions, perhaps the central questions facing anyone who worries about the current state of civic discourse. Is it possible to facilitate a space for open dialogue without also facilitating hoaxes, harassment, and threats of violence? Where is the line between authenticity and toxicity? What if, after technology allows us to reveal our inner voices, what we learn is that many of us are authentically toxic?

The only way to understand the Internet, at least at first, was by metaphor. "Web" and "page" and "superhighway" are metaphors. So are "link," "viral," "post," and "stream." Last year,

the Supreme Court heard a case about whether it was constitutional to bar registered sex offenders from using social media. In order to answer that question, the Justices had to ask another question: What is social media? In sixty minutes of oral argument, Facebook was compared to a park, a playground, an airport terminal, a polling place, and a town square.

It might be most helpful to compare a social network to a party. The party starts out small, with the hosts and a few of their friends. Then word gets out and strangers show up. People take cues from the environment. Mimosas in a sun-dappled atrium suggest one kind of mood; grain alcohol in a moldy basement suggests another. Sometimes, a pattern emerges on its own. Pinterest, a simple photo-sharing site founded by three men, happened to catch on among women aspiring to an urbane life style, and today the front page is often a collage of merino scarves and expensive glassware. In other cases, the gatekeeping seems more premeditated. If you're fourteen, Snapchat's user interface is intuitive; if you're twenty-two, it's intriguing; if you're over thirty-five, it's impenetrable. This encourages old people to self-deport.

Huffman and his college roommate, Alexis Ohanian, founded Reddit a few weeks after graduating from the University of Virginia, in 2005. The first people to show up were, like the co-founders, the kind of strong-headed young men who got excited about computer programming, video games, and edgy, self-referential humor. Reddit's system was purely democratic, which is to say anarchic. Anyone could post any link, and the ones that got the most "upvotes" would rise to the top of a page. At the time, Facebook was available only to college students, and before joining it you had to provide your real name, your birthday, and a valid school e-mail address—the equivalent of being carded at the door. To join Reddit, all you needed was a username that hadn't been claimed yet. You could start as many anonymous accounts as you wanted, which gave rise to creativity, and also to mischief.

Back then, Ohanian was ungainly and clean-shaven, and he was often photographed in a hoodie and with a

goofy smile. At his wedding, last year, wearing a beard and an Armani tuxedo, he was nearly unrecognizable. (The paparazzi weren't too interested in him, though, given that his bride was Serena Williams.) Huffman, on the other hand, has always looked more or less the same: bright-blue eyes, chipmunk teeth, and a thatch of blond hair.

A few months after Reddit launched, Huffman created the first constraints. People were posting links to vulgar and violent content—which was fine, except that Huffman wanted users to have some idea of what they were about to click on, so that they could avoid, say, inadvertently opening porn in front of their bosses. Huffman labelled some content N.S.F.W.—not safe for work—and separated it from everything else. That was the end of pure democracy.

In 2006, Ohanian and Huffman sold Reddit to Condé Nast, a media conglomerate that owns more than twenty magazines, including this one. (Reddit now operates independently.) The sale made them twenty-two-year-old millionaires, but they didn't fit in at a large corporation, and three years later they left. In their absence, the party got bigger and weirder, and ominous cliques started to gather in the corners. One popular subreddit, *r/Jailbait*, was devoted to sexually suggestive photos of young-looking women. This was profoundly creepy, but probably not illegal—the subreddit's users swore that all the women in the photos were eighteen or older—and Reddit allowed the community to grow. In September of 2011, Anderson Cooper discussed the subreddit on CNN. "It's pretty amazing that a big corporation would have something like this, which reflects badly on it," he said. Traffic to Jailbait quadrupled overnight. Twelve days later, after someone in the group apparently shared a nude photo of a fourteen-year-old girl, the community was banned. And yet the founder of Jailbait, an infamous troll who went by *u/Violentacrez*, was allowed to stay on Reddit, as were some four hundred other communities he'd created—*r/Jewmerica*, *r/ChokeABitch*, and worse. (Yes, it gets worse.)

Yishan Wong, an engineer who had worked at Facebook, was then Reddit's C.E.O. He implied that he'd banned Jailbait only because the subreddit had violated U.S. law. "We stand for free speech," he wrote in an internal post, in 2012. Reddit's goal, he continued, was to "become a universal platform for human discourse." Therefore, "it would not do if, in our youth, we decided to censor things simply because they were distasteful."

At the time, Wong's free-speech absolutism was ubiquitous in Silicon Valley. Twitter's executives referred to their company as "the free-speech wing of the free-speech party." Facebook's original self-description, "an online directory that connects people through social networks at colleges," had evolved into a grandiose mission statement: "Facebook gives people the power to share and make the world more open and connected." With the Arab Spring fresh in everyone's mind, few questioned the assumption that "giving people the power" would inevitably lead to social progress. Barack Obama, who had been carried into office by a social-media groundswell, often expressed a similar optimism about the salubrious effects of the Internet. "In the twenty-first century, information is power," Obama said in a 2011 speech on Middle East policy. "The truth cannot be hidden. . . . Such



open discourse is important even if what is said does not square with our worldview."

Wong left the company in 2014, after two and a half years. His successor was Ellen Pao, a former venture capitalist. She lasted eight months. Early in her tenure, Reddit announced a crackdown on involuntary pornography. If you found a compromising photo of yourself circulating on Reddit without your consent, you could

report it and the company would remove it. In retrospect, this seems like a straightforward business decision, but some redditors treated it as the first in an inevitable parade of horrors. "This rule is stupid and suppresses our rights," *u/penisfucker-mcgee* commented.

A few months later, Reddit banned five of its most egregious communities, including *r/FatPeopleHate* and *r/ShitNiggersSay*. Again redditors were apoplectic ("We may as well take a one way ticket to North Korea"). Almost every day, strident misogynists called Pao a tyrant, an "Asian slut," or worse. (Yes, it gets worse.) She resigned in July, 2015. "The Internet started as a bastion for free expression," she wrote in the *Washington Post*. "But that balancing act is getting harder. The trolls are winning."

Over time, social networks have turned into institutions. More than two billion people now use Facebook. In other words, the company has achieved its mission of making the world more connected. In 2016, that meant, among other things, making the American electorate more connected to white supremacists, armed militias, Macedonian fake-news merchants, and micro-targeted campaign ads purchased in rubles. "I continue to believe Mr. Trump will not be President," Obama said that year, despite the mounting aggression in some online forums. "And the reason is because I have a lot of faith in the American people." (In response to Obama's remarks, a commenter on *The_Donald* wrote, "FUCK THAT LOW ENERGY CUCK!")

Shortly after the election, Brad Parscale, the Trump campaign's top digital strategist, told *Wired*, "Facebook and Twitter were the reason we won this thing." Reddit was also an important part of Trump's strategy. Parscale wrote—on Reddit, naturally—that "members here provided considerable growth and reach to our campaign." *The_Donald*, in particular, proved a fecund host cell for viral memes. On July 2, 2016, Trump tweeted a photo collage of Hillary Clinton, piles of cash, and the phrase "Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!" written inside a

six-pointed star. When Trump's critics called attention to the image's anti-Semitic implications, The_Donald's users rushed to Trump's defense, posting photos of other six-pointed stars in innocuous contexts. "Where is the outrage from the liberal left on this one?" a user wrote, beneath a photo of a "Frozen"-themed sticker book with a star on its cover. A few hours later, Trump tweeted the same photo, with a version of the same question, followed by "Dishonest media! #Frozen."

During the campaign, Trump, or someone typing on his behalf, participated in Reddit's signature interview format—an A.M.A., for "ask me anything." In response to a question about the "protected class of media elites," Trump wrote, "I have been very concerned about media bias and the total dishonesty of the press. I think new media is a great way to get out the truth." This drew hundreds of jubilant comments (u/RAINBOW_DILDO: "daddy YES"; u/CantConthe-

Don: "WE'RE THE MEDIA NOW").

The_Donald, with more than half a million subscribers, is by far the biggest pro-Trump subreddit, but it ranks just below No. 150 on the list of all subreddits; it's roughly the same size as r/CryptoCurrency and r/ComicBooks. "Some people on The_Donald are expressing their genuine political beliefs, and obviously that's something we want to encourage," Huffman said. "Others are maybe not expressing sincere beliefs, but are treating it more like a game—If I post this ridiculous or offensive thing, can I get people to upvote it? And then some people, to quote 'The Dark Knight,' just want to watch the world burn." On some smaller far-right subreddits, the discourse is more unhinged. One, created in July of 2016, was called r/Physical_Removal. According to its "About Us" section, it was a subreddit for people who believe that liberals "qualify to get a helicopter ride." "Helicopter ride," an allusion to Augusto Pinochet's reputed habit

of throwing Communists out of helicopters, is alt-right slang for murder.

The_Donald accounts for less than one per cent of Reddit's traffic, but it occupies far more than one per cent of the Reddit-wide conversation. Trolls set a cunning trap. By ignoring their provocations, you risk seeming complicit. By responding, you amplify their message. Trump, perhaps the world's most skilled troll, can get attention whenever he wants, simply by being outrageous. Traditional journalists and editors can decide to resist the bait, and sometimes they do, but that option isn't available on user-generated platforms. Social-media executives claim to transcend subjectivity, and they have designed their platforms to be feedback machines, giving us not what we claim to want, nor what might be good for us, but what we actually pay attention to.

There are no good solutions to this problem, and so tech executives tend to discuss it as seldom as possible, and only in the airiest of platitudes. Twitter has rebuffed repeated calls to ban President Trump's account, despite his many apparent violations of company policy. (If tweeting that North Korea "won't be around much longer" doesn't break Twitter's rule against "specific threats of violence," it's not clear what would.) Last fall, on his Facebook page, Mark Zuckerberg addressed—sort of, obliquely—the widespread critique that his company was exacerbating political polarization. "We'll keep working to ensure the integrity of free and fair elections around the world, and to ensure our community is a platform for all ideas and force for good in democracy," he wrote, then stepped away as a global howl of frustration grew in the comments.

I asked a few social-media executives to talk to me about all this. I didn't expect definitive answers, I told them; I just wanted to hear them think through the questions. Unsurprisingly, no one jumped at the chance. Twitter mostly ignored my e-mails. Snapchat's P.R. representatives had breakfast with me once, then ignored my e-mails. Facebook's representatives talked to me for weeks, asking precise, intelligent questions, before they started to ignore my e-mails.

Reddit has more reason to be trans-



parent. It's big, but doesn't feel indispensable to most Internet users or, for that matter, to most advertisers. Moreover, Anderson Cooper's CNN segment was hardly the only bit of vividly terrible press that Reddit has received over the years. All social networks contain vitriol and bigotry, but not all social networks are equally associated with these things in the public imagination. Recently, I typed "Reddit is" into Google. Three of the top suggested auto-completions were "toxic," "cancer," and "hot garbage."

Huffman, after leaving Condé Nast, spent a few months backpacking in Costa Rica, then founded a travel company called Hipmunk. In July, 2015, he returned to Reddit as C.E.O. In a post about his "top priority" in the job, he wrote, "The overwhelming majority of content on reddit comes from wonderful, creative, funny, smart, and silly communities. There is also a dark side, communities whose purpose is reprehensible, and we don't have any obligation to support them. . . . Neither Alexis nor I created reddit to be a bastion of free speech." This was shocking, and about half true. When free-speech absolutism was in vogue, Reddit's co-founders were as susceptible to its appeal as anyone. In 2012, a *Forbes* reporter asked Ohanian how the Founding Fathers might have reacted to Reddit. "A bastion of free speech on the World Wide Web? I bet they would like it," Ohanian responded. "I would love to imagine that 'Common Sense' would have been a self-post on Reddit, by Thomas Paine, or actually a redditor named T_Paine."

Still, Ohanian and Huffman never took their own rhetoric too literally. The site's rules were brief and vague, and their unwritten policy was even simpler. "We always banned people," Huffman told me. "We just didn't talk about it very much." Because Reddit was so small, and misbehavior relatively rare, Huffman could do most of the banning himself, on an ad-hoc basis. "It wasn't well thought out or even articulated, really. It was 'That guy has the N-word in his username? Fuck that.' Delete account."

As C.E.O., Huffman continued the trend Pao had started, banning a few viciously racist subreddits such as

r/Coontown. "There was pushback," Huffman told me. "But I had the moral authority, as the founder, to take it in stride." If Pao was like a forbearing parent, then Huffman's style was closer to "I brought you into this world, and I can take you out of it." "Yes, I know that it's really hard to define hate speech, and I know that any way we define it has the potential to set a dangerous precedent," he told me. "I also know that a community called Coontown is not good for Reddit." In most cases, Reddit didn't suspend individual users' accounts, Huffman said: "We just took away the spaces where they liked to hang out, and went, 'Let's see if this helps.'"

Reddit's headquarters, in a former radio tower in downtown San Francisco, look like a stereotypical startup office: high concrete ceilings, a large common area with beer and kombucha on tap. Each desk is decorated aggressively with personal flair—a "Make Reddit Great Again" hat, a glossy print magazine called *Meme Insider*. Working at Reddit requires paying close anthropological attention to the motley tastes of redditors, and it's not uncommon to see groups of fit, well-dressed employees cheerfully discussing the most recent post on r/Cat-Dimension or r/PeopleFuckingDying.

The first morning I visited the office, I ran into Huffman, who was wearing jeans, a T-shirt, and Adidas indoor-soccer shoes, as he tried to persuade an employee to buy a ticket to Burning Man. Huffman is far more unfiltered than other social-media executives, and every time he and I talked in the presence of Reddit's head of P.R., he said at least one thing that made her wince. "There's only one Steve," Ohanian told me. "No matter when you catch him, for better or worse, that's the Steve you're gonna get." I had a list of delicate topics that I planned to ask Huffman about eventually, including allegations of vote manipulation on Reddit's front page and his personal feelings about Trump. Huffman raised

all of them himself on the first day. "My political views might not be exactly what you'd predict," he said. "I'm a gun owner, for example. And I don't care all that much about politics, compared to other things." He speaks in quick bursts, with an alpha-nerd combination of introversion and confidence. His

opinion about Trump is that he is incompetent and that his Presidency has mostly been a failure. But, he told me, "I'm open to counterarguments."

That afternoon, I watched Huffman make a sales pitch to a group of executives from a New York advertising agency. Like many platforms, Red-

dit has struggled to convert its huge audience into a stable revenue stream, and its representatives spend a lot of time trying to convince potential advertisers that Reddit is not hot garbage. Huffman sat at the head of a long table, facing a dozen men and women in suits. The "snarky, libertarian" ethos of early Reddit, he said, "mostly came from me as a twenty-one-year-old. I've since grown out of that, to the relief of everyone." The executives nodded and chuckled. "We had a lot of baggage," he continued. "We let the story get away from us. And now we're trying to get our shit together."

Later, Huffman told me that getting Reddit's shit together would require continual intervention. "I don't think I'm going to leave the office one Friday and go, 'Mission accomplished—we fixed the Internet,'" he said. "Every day, you keep visiting different parts of the site, opening this random door or that random door—'What's it like in here? Does this feel like a shitty place to be? No, people are generally having a good time, nobody's hatching any evil plots, nobody's crying. O.K., great.' And you move on to the next room."

In January, Facebook announced that it would make news less visible in its users' feeds. "Facebook was originally designed to connect friends and family—and it has excelled at that," a product manager named Samidh Chakrabarti wrote on a company blog. "But



as unprecedented numbers of people channel their political energy through this medium, it's being used in unforeseen ways with societal repercussions that were never anticipated." It wasn't the most effusive mea culpa in history, but by Facebook's standards it amounted to wailing and gnashing of teeth. "We want to make sure that our products are not just fun, but are good for people," Mark Zuckerberg told the *Times*. Direct pronouncements from him are so rare that even this pabulum was treated as push-alert-worthy news.

In retrospect, although Facebook denies this, it seems clear that the company was preparing for a blow that was about to land. On February 16th, the special counsel Robert Mueller filed an indictment against several Russian individuals and businesses, including the Internet Research Agency, a company aligned with the Kremlin. The indictment mentioned Facebook thirty-five times, and not in ways that made the platform seem like a "force for good in democracy." According to recent reporting by the Daily Beast, the Internet Research Agency also seeded Reddit with disinformation during the 2016 election. (A group of impostors even tried to set up an A.M.A.) Last Monday, the Washington *Post* reported that the Senate Intelligence Committee will question Reddit executives about this; the same day, Huffman admitted that the company had "found and removed a few hundred accounts" associated with Russian propaganda. (A Reddit representative told me that the company has been cooperating with congressional investigators "for months," although they haven't spoken about it publicly.) As in all such disinformation campaigns, the Russians did not act alone: their messages were upvoted and repeated by thousands of unsuspecting Americans. "I believe the biggest risk we face as Americans is our own ability to discern reality from nonsense," Huffman wrote. "I wish there was a solution as simple as banning all propaganda, but it's not that easy."

Zuckerberg recently set a "personal

challenge" for himself: "enforcing our policies and preventing misuse of our tools." This seems to be a reversal for Zuckerberg, who was once a fake-news truther. Two days after the 2016 election, he said, "The idea that fake news on Facebook, of which it's a very small amount of the content, influenced the election in any way, I think, is a pretty crazy idea. Voters make decisions based on their lived experience." This was a pretty crazy idea, and Zuckerberg has been walking it back ever since. It's obvious that what we see online affects how we think and feel. We know this in part because Facebook

has done research on it. In 2012, without notice or permission, Facebook tweaked the feeds of nearly seven hundred thousand of its users, showing one group more posts containing "positive emotional content" and the other more "negative emotional content." Two years later, Facebook declassified the experiment and published the results. Users were livid, and, after that, Facebook either stopped conducting secret experiments or stopped admitting to them. But the results of the experiment were clear: the people with happier feeds acted happier, and vice versa. The study's authors called it "massive-scale emotional contagion." Since then, social media has only grown in size and influence, and the persuasive tools available to advertisers, spies, politicians, and propagandists have only become sharper. During the 2016 election, a few Russian impostors affected many Americans' beliefs and, presumably, votes. With another election coming up, most of the loopholes that the Russians exploited have not been closed, and the main loophole—the open, connected, massively contagious world of social media—might not be closable.

When I raised this issue with Huffman over dinner last summer, he said, "I go back and forth on whether Reddit is the tail or the dog. I think it's a bit of both." First, he laid out the tail hypothesis: "Reddit is a reflection of reality. People are

enthusiastic about Bernie or Trump in real life, so they go on Reddit and talk about how much they like Bernie or Trump. So far, so good." Then he laid out the dog hypothesis, which his fellow social-media executives almost never acknowledge—that reality is also a reflection of social media. "All sorts of weird things can happen online," he said. "Imagine I post a joke where the point is to be offensive—like, to imply, 'This is something that a racist person would say'—but you misread the context and think, 'Yeah, that racist guy has a good point.' That kind of dynamic, I think, explains a lot of what happened on The_Donald, at least in the early days—someone keeps pushing a joke or a meme to see how far they can take it, and the answer turns out to be Pretty fucking far."

Leftist communities on Reddit often implore the company to ban The_Donald. So far, Huffman has demurred. "There are arguments on both sides," he said, "but, ultimately, my view is that their anger comes from feeling like they don't have a voice, so it won't solve anything if I take away their voice." He thought of something else to say, but decided against it. Then he took a swig of beer and said it anyway. "I'm confident that Reddit could sway elections," he told me. "We wouldn't do it, of course. And I don't know how many times we could get away with it. But, if we really wanted to, I'm sure Reddit could have swayed at least this election, this once." That's a terrifying thought. It's also almost certainly true.

On August 11th, Huffman's alma mater, the University of Virginia, was overrun by white nationalists carrying torches. "I was on a plane when I saw the news, and I got really emotional," Huffman said. He told his employees, "If any of these people are on Reddit, I want them gone. Nuke 'em." This felt cathartic, but personal catharsis is an awful way to make policy. "Luckily, my team knew me well enough to go, 'Steve, you're pissed off right now. Let's talk about it more rationally on Monday.'"

Early the next week, Reddit banned Physical Removal. In Charlottesville,



James Alex Fields, one of the white nationalists, had driven a car into a crowd of counterprotesters, injuring nineteen and killing a woman named Heather Heyer. “This is a good thing,” the top post on Physical_Removal read. “They are mockeries of life and need to fucking go.” Reddit had a rule prohibiting content that “encourages or incites violence,” and this was a violation of that rule. Huffman said, “We’d had our eye on that community for a while, and it felt good to get rid of them, I have to say. But it still didn’t feel like enough.”

“Encouraging or inciting violence” was a narrow standard, and Huffman and his team agreed to expand it. Four words became thirty-six: “Do not post content that encourages, glorifies, incites, or calls for violence or physical harm against an individual or a group of people; likewise, do not post content that glorifies or encourages the abuse of animals.” This, too, required interpretation, and forced the company to create a non-exhaustive list of exceptions (“educational, newsworthy, artistic, satire, documentary”). Still, it made the team’s intentions clearer. Jessica Ashooh, Reddit’s head of policy, spent four years as a policy consultant in Abu Dhabi. “I know what it’s like to live under censorship,” she said. “My internal check, when I’m arguing for a restrictive policy on the site, is Do I sound like an Arab government? If so, maybe I should scale it back.” On the other hand, she said, “people hide behind the notion that there’s a bright line between ideology and action, but some ideologies are inherently more violent than others.”

In October, on the morning the new policy was rolled out, Ashooh sat at a long conference table with a dozen other employees. Before each of them was a laptop, a mug of coffee, and a few hours’ worth of snacks. “Welcome to the Policy Update War Room,” she said. “And, yes, I’m aware of the irony of calling it a war room when the point is to make Reddit less violent, but it’s too late to change the name.” The job of policing Reddit’s most pernicious content falls primarily to three groups of employees—the community team, the trust-and-safety team, and the anti-evil team—which are sometimes de-

scribed, respectively, as good cop, bad cop, and RoboCop. Community stays in touch with a cross-section of redditors, asking them for feedback and encouraging them to be on their best behavior. When this fails and redditors break the rules, trust and safety punishes them. Anti-evil, a team of back-end engineers, makes software that flags dodgy-looking content and sends that content to humans, who decide what to do about it.

Ashooh went over the plan for the day. All at once, they would replace the old policy with the new policy, post an announcement explaining the new policy, warn a batch of subreddits that they were probably in violation of the new policy, and ban another batch of subreddits that were flagrantly, irredeemably in violation. I glanced at a spreadsheet with a list of the hundred and nine subreddits that were about to be banned (r/KKK, r/KillAllJews, r/KilltheJews, r/Kill-theJoos), followed by the name of the employee who would carry out each deletion, and, if applicable, the reason for the ban (“mostly just swastikas?”). “Today we’re focussing on a lot of Nazi stuff and bestiality stuff,” Ashooh said. “Context matters, of course, and you shouldn’t get in trouble for posting a swastika if it’s a historical photo from the 1936 Olympics, or if you’re using it as a Hindu

symbol. But, even so, there’s a lot that’s clear-cut.” I asked whether the same logic—that the Nazi flag was an inherently violent symbol—would apply to the Confederate flag, or the Soviet flag, or the flag under which King Richard fought the Crusades. “We can have those conversations in the future,” Ashooh said. “But we have to start somewhere.”

At 10 A.M., the trust-and-safety team posted the announcement and began the purge. “Thank you for letting me do DylannRoofInnocent,” one employee said. “That was one of the ones I really wanted.”

“What is ReallyWackyTicTacs?” another employee asked, looking down the list.

“Trust me, you don’t want to know,” Ashooh said. “That was the most unpleasant shit I’ve ever seen, and I’ve spent a lot of time looking into Syrian war crimes.”

Some of the comments on the announcement were cynical. “They don’t actually want to change anything,” one redditor wrote, arguing that the bans were meant to appease advertisers. “It was, in fact, never about free speech, it was about money.” One trust-and-safety manager, a young woman wearing a leather jacket and a ship captain’s cap, was in charge of monitoring the comments and responding to the most relevant ones. “Everyone seems



“Are we gonna have to scrape the Daddy decal off the minivan?”

self on fire, I know where you live'? If your entire answer to that very difficult question is 'Free speech,' then, I'm sorry, that tells me that you're not really paying attention."

It has become a tradition for tech companies to release elaborate, self-referential jokes every April Fools' Day. The point is to generate some free publicity that will make the company seem quirky and relatable, but it can also have the opposite effect, especially when the premise of the joke is Silicon Valley's unprecedented power. A few years ago, Twitter announced that it would start charging for vowels. Last year, Google shared a mockup of its new data center on Mars, and Amazon revealed voice-recognition software that would take commands from pets. The companies hadn't actually initiated any of these projects, but they probably could, one day, if they wanted to. Get it?

Last April Fools', instead of a parody announcement, Reddit unveiled a genuine social experiment. It was called r/Place, and it was a blank square, a thousand pixels by a thousand pixels. In the beginning, all million pixels were white. Once the experiment started, anyone could change a single pixel, anywhere on the grid, to one of sixteen colors. The only restriction was speed: the algorithm allowed each redditor to alter just one pixel every five minutes. "That way, no one person can take over—it's too slow," Josh Wardle, the Reddit product manager in charge of Place, explained. "In order to do anything at scale, they're gonna have to cooperate."

Place had been active for about twenty minutes when I stopped by, and Wardle was huddled over his laptop, frantically refreshing dozens of tabs. So far, the square was mostly blank, with a few stray dots blinking in and out of existence. But redditors were making plans in the comments and, in true Reddit fashion, clinging to those plans with cultish intensity. The Blue Empire was conspiring to turn the whole square blue; the Red Empire vowed to make it red; already, they were on a war footing. Other groups planned elaborate messages, fractal patterns, and references to various memes. A multi-partisan group—leftists, Trump

supporters, patriotic libertarians, and pre-political teen-agers—decided to draw an American flag in the center of the square. They congregated at r/AmericanFlagInPlace, where they hashed out the exact dimensions, the shapes of the stars and stripes, and strategies for repelling invaders. Meanwhile, a group of nihilists at r/BlackVoid prepared to blot out whatever the other groups created.

Wardle went to great lengths to show me that Place was a pure democracy—the algorithm was designed so that, once it went live, all he could do was watch, along with everyone else. Now that he was watching, he seemed deeply nervous. "The idea was 'Let's put up a very simple microcosm of the Internet and just see what happens,'" he said. "Reddit itself is not the most complex idea. It's sort of a blank canvas. The community takes that and does all sorts of creative things with it."

"And some terrible things," I said.

He paused. "I'm pretty confident," he said. "I'd be lying if I said I was a hundred per cent confident." Already, one of the top comments on Place read, "I give this an hour until swastikas." Later, one of Wardle's colleagues told me, "That was what kept Josh up at night. Before this went live, he was literally calculating, 'O.K., it takes a minimum of seventeen pixels to make a swastika—what if we open this up to the world, and the headline the next day is 'REDDIT: A PLACE TO DRAW SWASTIKAS ON THE INTERNET'?"

The upper-left corner was a choppy, flickering purple, as the Blue Empire and the Red Empire battled for dominance. A graffiti artist, or artists, wrote, "9/11 was an inside job"; a few minutes later, the "was" turned into "wasn't," and the "an" became "anime." Elsewhere, "Dick butt" became "Dick butter," then "Dick buffet." And then the swastikas appeared—just a few of them, but enough to make Wardle raise the hood of his sweatshirt, retreat into an empty conference room, and shut the door, looking pallid.

In his office, Huffman met with Chris Slowe, Reddit's first employee, who is now the chief technical officer.

"How is Place going?" Huffman asked.

"Pretty much as expected," Slowe

said. "A lot of memes, some Pokémon, and a barrage of dicks."

"If there's ever a Reddit musical, that wouldn't be a bad title," Huffman said. "Maybe I should write a memoir called 'A Barrage of Dicks.'"

"I have faith in our people," Slowe said.

Lunch was served: a shrimp-and-lentil salad and a vegan bean fricassee. People stood in the common area, holding paper plates, watching a live feed of Place on a wall-mounted TV.

One employee, reading the comments, said, "A bunch of people are finding swastikas and then telling everyone else where they are, so that people can go get rid of them."

"I just saw it!" another said. He pointed to a section of the screen. As we watched, one swastika was erased and another was modified to become a Windows 95 logo. Eventually, the swastika-makers got bored and moved on.

At one point, the American flag caught on fire; the fire was stamped out, and the Reddit employees cheered.

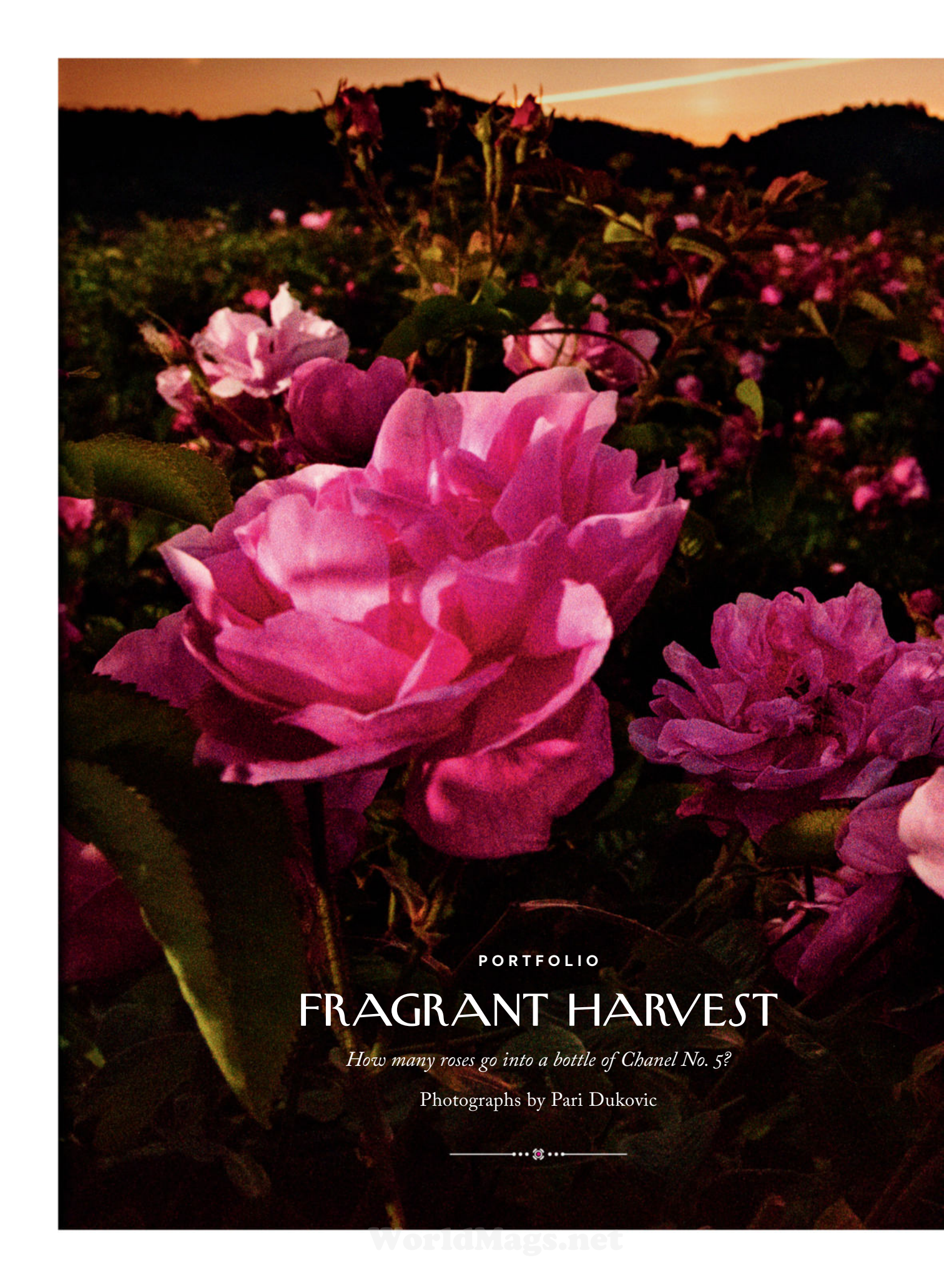
"Feels like watching a football game in extreme slow motion," one said.

"Or like watching the election results."

"Oh, God, don't say that."

Toward the end, the square was a dense, colorful tapestry, chaotic and strangely captivating. It was a collage of hundreds of incongruous images: logos of colleges, sports teams, bands, and video-game companies; a transcribed monologue from "Star Wars"; likenesses of He-Man, David Bowie, the "Mona Lisa," and a former Prime Minister of Finland. In the final hours, shortly before the experiment ended and the image was frozen for posterity, BlackVoid launched a surprise attack on the American flag. A dark fissure tore at the bottom of the flag, then overtook the whole thing. For a few minutes, the center was engulfed in darkness. Then a broad coalition rallied to beat back the Void; the stars and stripes regained their form, and, in the end, the flag was still there.

The final image contained no visible hate symbols, no violent threats, not even much nudity. Late in the day, Wardle emerged from hiding, poured himself a drink, and pushed back his hood. "It's possible that I will be able to sleep tonight," he said. ♦

A photograph of a field of pink roses at sunset. The roses are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The background shows a dark silhouette of a field and a bright orange and yellow sky. The overall mood is romantic and serene.

PORTFOLIO

FRAGRANT HARVEST

How many roses go into a bottle of Chanel No. 5?

Photographs by Pari Dukovic







In late spring, the bees arrive at Joseph Mul's fields near Pégomas, France, at around nine-thirty each morning. The unmarked fifty acres border a gravel path, which veers off a country road that cuts through a sheltered valley. To the northeast, one can make out the dark-blue mounds of the pre-Alps. A tickly breeze blows in from the Mediterranean, a few miles to the east. For non-pollinators, the site is almost impossible to find. This is intentional, as, since the mid-nineteen-eighties, the Mul family has had an exclusive partnership to grow jasmine and roses for Chanel. The company uses the flowers to make Chanel No. 5—a perfume that, in the way of a Cavailon melon or a piece of Sèvres porcelain, comes from a specific place.

The roses are *Rosa centifolia*: “hundred petal” roses, or cabbage roses, their frilly, dishevelled flowers often bowing under their own weight. The species is prized for its clear, sweet, honeyed scent. If it were a musical instrument, it might be a flute. It is so distinctive that Mul, whose great-grandfather started the farm in the early nineteen-hundreds, can identify a rose grown in Pégomas with his eyes closed. “You can compare it to wine,” he said recently. “A Burgundy from anywhere else isn't a Burgundy.”

One early morning last May, Mul was standing in the middle of his pink rows, their fragrance intensifying as the sun ascended. Grabbing a blossom by the calyx, he demonstrated the proper way to cull a rose. “One finger over, one finger under,” he said. “Then twist! You can hear the snap.” When the roses bloom, the entire fifty acres must be harvested in two weeks. Mul works with his son-in-law, Fabrice Bianchi, to supervise a crew that comprises seventy pickers (mainly Turkish women, many of them related) and four *videurs* (mainly French men, into whose burlap sacks the women empty their aprons). They were expecting to haul in thirty-seven tons of flowers. The pickers worked in pairs and gossiped as they gleaned. Songul Ozer, singing to herself, said that she preferred the work to her old job, as a secretary. It was her fifth season in the Mul fields. The

symmetry of the women's movements and their pale, wide-brimmed hats gave the scene the look of a Bruegel painting.

Once the roses have been harvested, their oils must be extracted quickly, before they start to ferment. “Put one in your fist,” Mul said, wrapping his weathered brown hand around mine. “Even after two or three minutes, it's not going to have the same smell.” He was right: the rose had become slightly more peppery. Three to five hundred roses make a kilo. The *videurs* filled sacks of ten kilos apiece and loaded them onto a flatbed truck. Within the hour, they were delivered to an on-site factory. “We have a phrase, *‘la fleur au flacon’*—the flower into the bottle,” Olivier Polge, Chanel's head perfumer, or “nose,” said, explaining how the setup presents a competitive advantage. “I'm able to work like a painter with his special colors,” he said. “It's our own Pantone of perfume.”

Polge, who is the fourth nose in Chanel's history, took over the job from his father. Mul's cousin Jean-François Vieille oversees the factory. As he explained how blossoms become smells—aided by a pedagogical poster tracing the process from raw material (petals) to concrete (a waxy solid) to absolute (a highly concentrated oil that goes directly into many perfumes)—workers dumped sack after sack of roses into a giant metal vat, as though they were offloading loot in a heist film. This was the concrete-making phase. A worker used a pitchfork to even out the piles as Vieille pumped in two thousand litres of hexane, a colorless liquid solvent, heated it to sixty-eight degrees Celsius, and then reopened the vat. The flowers had gone from pink to brown. The air smelled of burned toast. The factory floor looked like a wedding processional had just passed through.

There were more steps, but, in the end, each thirty-millilitre bottle of Chanel No. 5 represents the after-life of a thousand Pégomas jasmine flowers and twelve Pégomas roses. “A living material gives you an identity that no synthetic can give,” Polge said. “People think of perfume as something elusive, but I really like this feet-in-the-mud side to it.”

—Lauren Collins



Rosa centifolia roses, grown by Joseph Mul, near Pégomas, France, are under exclusive contract for use in Chanel No. 5.



Burlap sacks of Rosa centifolia ("hundred petal" roses) are loaded onto flatbed trucks and delivered to an on-site factory within an hour of being picked; if their oils are not extracted quickly, they will begin to ferment.



The fifty acres of fields must be harvested in the span of two weeks. Seventy pickers, mainly Turkish women, collect the blooms in their aprons. Last spring, they were expecting a yield of thirty-seven tons.



In the oil-extracting process, two hundred kilos of Joseph Mul's roses are mixed with two thousand litres of hexane and



heated to sixty-eight degrees Celsius. The result smells like burned toast.

NO MORE MAYBE

By Gish Jen

Since my mother-in-law came to visit America she is quite busy. First, she has to eat many blueberries. Because in China they are expensive! While here they are comparatively cheap. Then she has to breathe the clean air. My husband, Wuji, and I have lived here for five years, so we are used to the air. But my mother-in-law has to take many fast walks. Breathing, breathing. Trying to clean out her lungs, she says, trying to get all the healthy oxygen inside her. She also has to look at the sky.

"So blue!" she says during the daytime. "I have not seen such a blue since I was a child."

At nighttime, she says, "Look at the stars. Look! Look!"

She has to post pictures of the stars on WeChat for her friends. And she has to take some English-language classes. Because these classes are expensive in China! she says. Here they are free.

She thinks this is very strange.

"Why are they free?" she asks. She says, "America is a capitalist country. What about so-called 'market force'?" "Market force" sticks out of her Chinese like a rock in a path. "And what about so-called 'invisible hands'?" she goes on, and there it is—another rock.

"'Invisible hand,'" my father-in-law says. Because he is the professor in the family, and the one who knows everything.

And, in fact, my mother-in-law only just learned about the invisible hand two days ago. Even yesterday she called Adam Smith "Alan Smith." But, in China, she was a volleyball coach. She has a lot of self-confidence. She talks with her chin in the air. Even though she is retired, she uses only the top half of her bifocals. It is as if she is still watching some game, looking for weakness on the other side of the net. And, sure enough, look: already she has found something fake

about America. America calls itself capitalist, but no one should be fooled. It is China that is capitalist.

"You know what free classes are?" she says. "Free classes are socialism!"

If my father-in-law likes to make points, my mother-in-law likes to score points.

Now my father-in-law hides his face in his rice bowl. Only his chopsticks move. It is as if he is trying to scratch a small, small message inside the bowl. One line. Two lines. Still scratching. We think maybe he cannot explain the free English lessons, either. Or maybe he just needs time to prepare his explanation. He was an outstanding thinker when he was young. But since he retired he has crazy, wild hair, like that conductor Seiji Ozawa, and his thinking is crazy wild, too.

We talk to help him. Try to make him comfortable, try to smooth things over.

"America is very strange," I say.

"It is not socialism," Wuji says. "It is capitalism with American characteristics."

"It is politically correct capitalism," I say.

Because this is what we know how to do. We know how to say something true enough to hide a bigger truth. We know how to hide people's weakness. How to protect them.

Of course, when he was young my father-in-law also protected people. Every day there was a new kind of craziness. Every day a new kind of corruption. He had a lot to manage. Still, no matter how bad the situation got he protected us and a lot of other people besides. It was a big talent he had, a real strength. We all remember it and appreciate what he did. But now that he is older he sometimes scatters seed for the chickens, as they say. He stirs things up instead of calming things down. Maybe this is what couples do

when they do not have sex. That is what Wuji says.

I think Wuji is full of such theories because I am too pregnant for sex.

Now my father-in-law's chopsticks stop scratching. He lowers his bowl.

"Maybe the government watches to see who comes to the English lessons," he says. "Maybe that is why they are free."

"That is crazy!" my mother-in-law says. "Watching everyone is a lot of work. Do you think Americans will do that kind of work? Only Chinese will do it. Americans are too lazy."

"Maybe it is a trap," my father-in-law says.

"What is there to trap?" my mother-in-law says. "Who wants to know that I'm taking English lessons? No one. I am nobody. No one is interested."

"Everyone knows the government here spies on people, just like in China," my father-in-law says. "Look at that movie 'Snowden.' They spy here, too. They do."

He reaches slowly for some steamed fish from the dish in the middle of the table. My mother-in-law takes her glasses off, as if the score is tied and she is ready to fight the other coach. So now poor Wuji has to say something. He is kind of like the ump.

"Yes, they spy in the U.S.," he says. "But it is not just like China. Here there are many more laws to protect the common citizen."

Wuji is careful because even an ump must know how to handle my father-in-law. He must first agree with his father, and only afterward disagree.

Still, my father-in-law argues. "Every government is the same," he says. "What if that person is so-called 'illegal immigrant,' right? You go to the free English classes. Then what? Then they catch you."

And suddenly we think, even if the classes were not originally a trap, maybe



they are a trap now. We think maybe my father-in-law is still smart. We think maybe we should listen to him.

After all, even though we are here legally, we see all the stories on the Internet. People are being stopped! People on buses. People even in hospitals. We carry our visas everywhere, and keep a list of places we should not go. Texas. New Hampshire. Alabama. Also, we do not talk too much to outside people. Of course, we do not talk too much to them anyway, because this is a city. People do not talk here; they honk. *Honk, honk, honk! You are in my way!* If they talk, they are yelling. *What the fuck are you doing? Don't you speak English?* But these days we talk even less. In fact, we are almost starting to think maybe my mother-in-law should not go to that English-language class, when she says, "If you think you can stop me from studying English, you can't! This is America! You can't!"

Her eyes glare so hard at my father-in-law that he ducks back into his rice bowl. Not as though he is backing down—more as though he has thought

of something else and has some more scratching to do.

So that is score one point for my mother-in-law.

Actually, for my mother-in-law English has no use. But she has always wished she could speak English like my father-in-law, who was a literature professor. It was just her bad luck that she took the college-entrance exam in 1977—the first time you could take it after the Cultural Revolution. She is still talking about how fierce the competition was. Two generations, both had to take the examination together, she says. All the teachers and all the students, sitting side by side. She says today she would probably get a top score and go to a top college, like my father-in-law. Because he was smart but also just lucky that he did so well. And he agrees. Some people did well who were not so smart, he says, and some people did not do well, though they were very smart. He agrees that today my mother-in-law would probably be outstanding, especially since, if you don't like your score, you can try

again. So she would probably try eight, nine, ten times! Until she succeeded.

She is not like Wuji or me, who were not outstanding but did not work so hard, either. We went to third-tier colleges and wished we had scored higher, of course, but did not care so much. Wuji says maybe this was because there was some money in his father's family, and even I knew ever since high school that Wuji and I would get married. So both of us knew we would have to work hard but would not have to work crazy hard just to live. Also, his parents are kind of like a fire generation. After a fire generation, it is only natural to have a water generation.

And, actually, my mother-in-law could relax a little, too. But she was always crazy worried when she was growing up, and now she is a person who studies even when it has no use. She says that, now that my father-in-law's English is declining, if she studies maybe they can meet like two roads. Maybe if her English goes up while his goes down they can meet at an intersection.

"And then what?" I ask.

"Then I will wave and say, 'Hi,'" she says, with a wink. "Then I will say, 'How are you, Professor? I can speak English, too.'"

Of course, it is completely absurd. But it is also sad. I feel sorry for my mother-in-law. It is as if she was born inside a box, so she can never really stand up straight. My mother always says I pity people I should not pity, and she is probably right. She says I am too soft. Because, after all, my mother cannot really stand up straight, either, and at least my mother-in-law has plenty to eat. My mother does not have plenty to eat. Still, when my father-in-law looks up from his rice, ready to fight again, I quickly say, "The baby is kicking!"

He laughs a little then, as if to say, "You Chinese girls are so obvious." And, "Why does everyone have to manage me?" But he lets go, too. He does not say anything and he does not fight with my mother-in-law. Because the baby is why they came. They came because Wuji and I are having a baby, and because they could afford to come. They are not like my mother, who has been on her own since my father died and can only Skype. And, of course, no one wants to upset the baby—and

if I am upset he will be upset. That is how Chinese people think. One thing always affects something else. So for now we have peace. I reach down and tell the baby, “*Sh-h-h, sh-h-h.*” He kicks hard on one side, a real boy. Everyone is so happy I am having a boy. And, on the other side, there is his round head. It is soft-hard, like a volleyball.

The English teacher recommends an English-language app. My father-in-law tells my mother-in-law, “Do not install it!” Though she can only say a few words so far, already he has had enough of her learning English to compete with him. But while she is out walking he picks up her phone and there it is. A little orange square on the screen.

“Did you help her?” my father-in-law asks me.

I nod, because in fact he already knows the answer. My mother-in-law cannot upload, download anything, after all. And Wuji would not dare defy his father to help. But I nod very gently, with both hands on top of my belly.

“No one can stop her, anyway,” he says then. Meaning, “At least you answered honestly and did not insult my intelligence.”

I nod again. “She will never stop,” I say.

“That is true,” he says. And he looks happy just to have this little conversation. To have someone agree with him, the way everyone used to.

Often, I drive my mother-in-law to the beautiful library, with the glass walls and the café. There are all kinds of people there, including black people and a lot of people you cannot say what color they are. You can only say they like books. My mother-in-law does not mind the people. Every day she finds a DVD to check out so she can practice her English some more after class. And then I pick her up so she can cook for me.

Actually, I help a lot when she cooks for me. Especially, I help with the shopping and the chopping. But she does the planning and the cooking, because my baby will be born in two months now, and she wants me to eat all kinds of special food. On the outside, my mother-in-law is a modern sports-

woman. But inside she is a traditional type. So I take American prenatal vitamins and calcium and DHA, of course. But also she feeds me steamed egg porridge with rice, and millet porridge. I have a glass of milk, red dates, fruit, and nuts every day. Tofu and bean sprouts every other day. And a lot of soups: pork-rib soup with lotus seeds or Chinese yam. Hen soup with mushrooms and more red dates. Soybean-and-pork-trotter soup. Even swallow’s-nest soup, which is very expensive. Because I am in my seventh month and my body has heated up, and because my mother-in-law has an app that says it’s O.K., I am allowed to have some cooling foods I could not have before. For example, some of her blueberries with a little ice cream. In China, there are pregnant women who eat a lot of blueberries. They think it will make their baby’s eyes shiny and round. But my mother-in-law says that is illogical thinking. She will let me have only a few.

Very important, too, everyone wants me to rest. “Take it easy,” they all say. “Go slow, go slow.” They say, “Rest, rest.” But how can anyone rest when my mother-in-law is cooking and learning English?

My father-in-law is not as busy as my mother-in-law. But he feels he has to keep up with her. Of course, he used to be very active, too. Wuji says his father used to have so many ideas he had to put a piece of paper next to his bed at night in order to write them all down. Only then could he go back to sleep. And now he still puts a piece of paper next to his bed. But in the morning it is almost always blank. If he writes something, he says he cannot read it. The writing is unclear. When he watches my mother-in-law’s DVDs, too, he nods as if he still understands everything. But then he complains. Why does she have to bring so many DVDs home? And why a new one every night, each one with faster speaking than the last? Another day, he complains she is so active she walks her legs even in her sleep.

“As if she is going somewhere!” he says.

Still, to keep up with her my father-in-law moves things around. For example, he does not think the feng-shui of our apartment is very good. So he

moves a bookcase to the entrance of the apartment. The bookcase is not that tall, only chest-high. But still it is a help, he says. A small wall inside the front door, to help block evil spirits from coming in. Then he sees that our bookshelves are not well organized. So, one by one, he takes the books and puts them in the correct order. Now we cannot find anything and have to walk around the bookcase to go out.

He wants to clean everything, too.

“No need, no need!” we say. “Everything is clean already!”

But still he cleans the fridge. Then he cleans the stove. Then he cleans the microwave. Next he fixes the bicycles. He oils Wuji’s bike chain. He repairs my bike basket. Actually, there was nothing wrong with my bike basket. Now it is pushed so far to the back, I cannot clip my light on it. But no one can ask him to put it back to where it was or he will say, “Don’t tell me what to do.” We have to do it quietly, by ourselves.

We are glad when he is all done.

One night in bed, Wuji says, “I told them they can stay as long as they like.”

“How could you promise without talking to me?” I say. “Is that respectful communication? Is that how a husband ought to behave? Does no one consider my feelings? Does my opinion not count at all?”

Before I was pregnant, I did not talk this way. But it is as if my belly is pressing down on my nerves. The bigger my belly, the more I say. Of course, Wuji is sorry. But do I remember? he asks. I agreed before we got married that his parents could come live with us when they got old. Also, he agreed that my mother could come. Remember? Because we are both only children. Our parents are our responsibility. Yes, he should still have told me he was going to raise the topic. But he didn’t have an opportunity, he says. Because he was trying to calm his parents down.

“Again,” I say.

“Yes, again,” he says. “That is my life’s real job. And now I have to calm you down, too. My poor pregnant wife.”

He puts his hands on my moving belly. The baby kicks him and he laughs. “Hey! So strong!” And then I say I understand. Because I feel sorry for him, that he has so many people to calm down. My mother says I do not realize I will

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VALUE BRAND OF THE YEAR
Wine & Spirits



A TO Z WINEWORKS
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FIDELIO

It's so narrow here. And kind of falsely
Shining with the return of spring.
Walking in the garden for an hour
Is not a solution. Saving each edition
Of the day as it lengthens and warms
Isn't progress. It's very narrow here,
Pages and pages of orders in a sheaf.
There seems to be a problem below
Because that's where they dug it.
If the state had a single neck I'd
Already slowly have drawn a bow
And stayed to watch the tenor pour out.
We finally see what we already know.
There are prisons both sides of the walls.
Statements that happen at the same time

In different places, at different times
In the same place, at different times
In different places form a single score.
No one can sing that music but all
Involve themselves in its performance,
Parody of another song to come
In a key also yet to. The doors open
On a garden, its wet petals still
Clustered shy of being individual,
Its people optimistic on their paths,
Reciting from the spontaneity
Minor roles can blossom. Here
The fact of prison affects each spring
The way an oboe tunes the orchestra.
Mostly one pursuit after another.

—Geoffrey G. O'Brien

end up a servant to everyone. "Soft and capable, the worst combination," she says. "You will serve everyone, and no one will serve you." Is that true? Maybe it is a mistake to tell Wuji he is right. Maybe it is a mistake to admit my pregnancy is making me talk crazy. Maybe it is a mistake to say I do not want to make trouble for him. But still I say, "Poor Wuji." Maybe because, inside, I think, This is the best way for my child.

"At least, if they move here we can buy a bigger place," he says. "There is that advantage to living in the United States. There is room here. It's not like China."

"That is true," I say. "There is that advantage."

"Plus, you know, even if we all buy a place together they might not move

in right away," Wuji says. "Maybe they won't, right? We don't know."

"Maybe not," I agree. "You're right. We don't know."

"And maybe they won't really like it here, anyway," Wuji says. "Maybe they'll miss China and want to go back. Or maybe they'll go back and forth. A lot of people do that. Go back and forth."

"You're right," I say. "A lot of people do do that. Maybe they will, too."

"Plus, maybe my father will be fine. We don't know, right? Maybe my mother will be able to handle him herself."

"Maybe he will," I say. "And maybe she will indeed be able to handle him by herself. It's hard to say. You're right."

In China, I had a clothes store. Not a very big store—in fact, quite a small store. Still, my friends would make

clothes and I would sell them, and we always made a little money. Because I figured everything out so well, my friends said. Because I made everything so smooth. Though, actually, their designs were outstanding, too. Then Wuji went to the U.S. for his doctorate, and I went with him. Now my store is like a beautiful picture I once saw, a long, long time ago, on Taobao. At first, my friends said they would send me clothes and I could sell them here. So I could still have a store.

"I'm not sure. Maybe the Americans will not like the clothes," I said at first.

Then, later, I said, "I think the Americans maybe do not like them."

And now I say, "The Americans just do not like our clothes."

No more maybe, in other words. Because that is just what happens. One day it is maybe, and then you just know.

My father-in-law says maybe he will wash Wuji's car.

Of course, he knows that Wuji bought a silver-colored car. Also, he has been in Wuji's silver car several times. Once, he tested the air-conditioning. Once, he told Wuji he was surprised there was no screen to show you how far away you are from the car behind you. Because all the children of his friends who had cars had that kind of screen, he said. Very useful. Of course, he understands that, in terms of technology, the United States is often quite backward. He knows that in the United States many people still use cash, for example. Still, he said, he was surprised.

Wuji agreed then that the United States was backward. But his car had no screen, he said, because his car was a used car.

"Ah," his father said.

"My car is an old model. Too old to have that kind of screen," Wuji said.

"Ah," his father said again. Then he said, "It is because you are only a lecturer. It is because you are not a professor."

"Yes," Wuji said. "A lecturer's salary is quite low."

He was calm, because in fact he already knew what his father thought.

Also, in his heart he would like to be a professor, too.

Still, my mother-in-law said, "Wuji is just as successful as the other sons! He got his Ph.D. in America! And at least he is not a volleyball coach, right?"

"Wuji jumps like an elephant," my father-in-law said. "He is so slow he has to wave the flies away; he cannot swat them. I do not think he could have become a volleyball coach."

If Wuji was not the ump in the family, maybe he would feel bad. But, instead, he calmly said, "I am not a coach and I am not a professor. I cannot jump and, truly, I am slow. But I am going to be a father."

And my father-in-law agreed then that Wuji had accomplished at least one important thing. Because a child born in America is a U.S. citizen. And a U.S. citizen can do anything!

"He is a success!" my mother-in-law said.

My father-in-law nodded.

But now, somehow, when my father-in-law cleans the car, and we go out to the parking lot to inspect it, Wuji's car does not look all clean and shiny.

"Beautiful!" we say, though we can see that it is not only just as old as before but still quite dirty.

Then my mother-in-law whispers, "Look!"

And that is when we see that the silver car across from Wuji's car is all clean. Should we point out that Wuji's car is a Nissan, and that car is a Toyota?

Not even my mother-in-law will try to score that point.

For two days we say nothing. I knit some baby clothes. I water some plants. I help cook. I eat.

My mother-in-law has found a special oatmeal place near our house and is interested in the grain, which is milled very fine. It is not like regular oatmeal, she says. It is more like millet. She serves it to me with soy sauce and sesame oil.

"Good for the baby," she says.

Meanwhile, the shiny car does not move. Every time we go out, it is still there in the parking lot. Clean.

The third day, my father-in-law washes Wuji's car.



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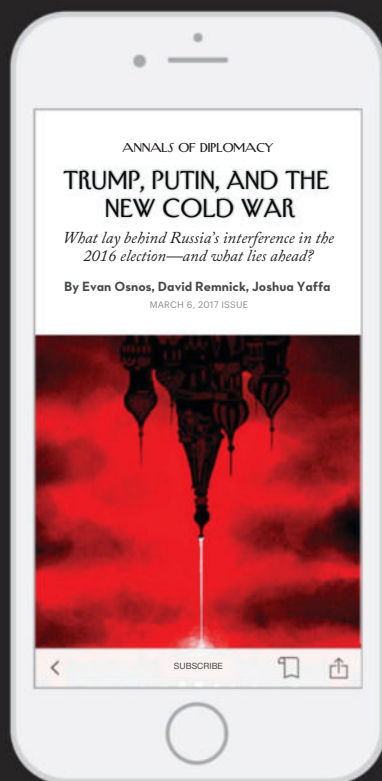
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We go outside again. We stand on the cracked asphalt.

“Beautiful!” we say. As if we did not say that the other day.

My father-in-law makes a kind of flower blossom with his lips. Then suddenly his eyes light up and he says, “Is there another silver car I can clean tomorrow?”

We laugh. We laugh because it is funny. We laugh because we are relieved. And we laugh because we want to cry. Because there he is—the man he was before his hair got so long. The man who made jokes and did not argue all day with his wife.

So what to do now about the first clean car? Should we write a note and put it on the windshield? And, if we do, what should the note say?

“It should say, ‘We are so sorry we cleaned the wrong car, but we are from China,’” my father-in-law suggests. “It should say, ‘We older people especially only know a few brands of cars. For example, BMW.’”

We laugh.

My father-in-law says, “Or else we can write, ‘Those Japanese cars, you know, they all look the same.’”

We laugh again.

But Wuji thinks it would be a mistake to write anything.

“You are right, we can write a note,” he says. “That is one approach. But American people don’t like people to touch their things. If they find a dent or a scratch or anything wrong, they will complain. If they can, they will even sue you. So I recommend we not write anything.”

Everyone is quiet. Will my father-in-law feel Wuji is telling him what to do?

“Don’t tell me what to do,” he says.

In the end, though, he follows Wuji’s recommendation and does not write anything.

The next day, the doorbell rings. Outside, there is a short black man with a cardboard box. We cannot see him too well because of the bookcase and also the screen door. But we can see that, actually, he is not really black. Actually, he is a rust color,

kind of like a fall chrysanthemum. He is wearing bluejeans and a T-shirt, and he is very similar in size to my father-in-law, except for his shoulders and his arms. My father-in-law is quite thin. This man’s muscles bulge out. He is wearing a gold earring, too, kind of like the Buddha, only just one earring, instead of two.

“Hi, my name is Jeff,” he says through the screen. “I heard you cleaned my car.”

He looks friendly. Still, my father-in-law stands between the bookcase and the door as if this Jeff is an evil spirit the bookcase might not be strong enough to keep out. My father-in-law is holding hard on to the apartment doorknob as

if to brace himself. He does not open the screen door.

“We did not clean anything,” he says in English. He speaks slowly and clearly.

Jeff raises his eyebrows so high, three deep creases appear on his forehead. The rolls of skin between them look like dragons.

“But our neighbors said they saw you out with a bucket and a sponge,” he says. “I just wanted to say thank you.”

Out of all this, my mother-in-law only gets the “thank you.” But, as she has been practicing in English class, she cries, “You’re welcome!”—spiking the words like a volleyball across the room.

Does Jeff feel encouraged by her words? Anyway, he starts again.

“I just wanted to say thank you,” he repeats. “I brought you a present.”

We think maybe my father-in-law needs more time to prepare. But we cannot help him. And sure enough, he says, slowly but clearly, “Is that really your car?”

Maybe he is just surprised. A black man with a newer car than Wuji’s. And who knows? Maybe this black man has a screen to show him what is behind the car when he is backing up.

But Jeff thinks something else.

“Did I steal it? Is that what you mean?” Jeff says.

“If you find something wrong, we did not do it,” my father-in-law says.

“There’s nothing wrong,” Jeff says.

“We did not wash your car,” my



father-in-law says. His hand is still holding on to the doorknob. "You have no proof."

"Is that so?" Jeff gives my father-in-law a funny look. Then finally he says, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to leave this cake here anyway."

He opens the screen door.

"Stop!" my father-in-law says.

But one foot is already inside. Jeff holds the screen door still with his shoulder. Then he opens the lid of the cake box. He props the box on his knee as he writes quickly in the icing with his finger. Then he closes the box and licks his fingertip.

"Here," he says. He hands the box to my father-in-law.

My father-in-law does not accept it.

"Take it," Jeff says.

My father-in-law does not move.

"I said take it," Jeff says again.

"Take it," Wuji says from behind the bookcase, in Chinese.

"Don't tell me what to do," my father-in-law says. But he takes the box.

Jeff leaves, muttering something we cannot hear.

We lock the knob and the bolt, then put the chain on, too.

Later, at dinner, we can see that although the cake originally said "THANK YOU!" on it in fancy blue letters, on top of that is now something else.

"Fucking As," my father-in-law says. "Fucking As." He frowns.

"I think it means, 'Fucking Asians,'" Wuji says.

My father-in-law still looks confused.

"The blacks do not like us," Wuji explains. "Because we are too smart."

"Also, we do not spend money like crazy," my mother-in-law says.

"They are afraid China is going to surpass America," I say.

"Fucking Asians," my father-in-law says. Then suddenly he says, "I saw that there were two cars. But I thought Wuji's car must be the new car."

He says, "I was confused."

He says, "A lot of English I do not understand anymore."

This should be my mother-in-law's happiest moment. Finally, she and my father-in-law have met at an intersection. This is the moment she can wave and say, "Hi! How are you, Professor? I

can speak English, too!" But, instead, she is looking down through the bottom of her bifocals. She is batting back tears.

No one moves. Only the baby is turning over and over, as if he is in a washing machine.

"We should give the cake back," Wuji says after a while.

"We should serve the cake into that man's windshield!" my mother-in-law says. She holds her hands as if she is ready to toss the cake into the air and punch it.

"Good idea," Wuji says.

On the way out of the apartment, he carries the cake up high, as if he is in a parade.

"Make sure you hit the Toyota!" my father-in-law jokes in English. "Make sure you don't hit the Nissan!"

Everyone laughs.

But Jeff's car is not there. So, when we come back in, we still have the cake.

"Maybe we should scrape off the frosting and see how it looks," I say.

"Good idea," Wuji says.

We scrape off the words and, sure enough, the cake looks better. My mother-in-law says, "We should have it with blueberries!" And, in the end, even I get three berries.

Then we turn on the DVD player. The DVD today is "The Sound of Music."

My father-in-law nods, getting ready to explain everything. He has seen this movie before and knows the story. He is prepared. Of course, in fact we have all seen it. We all know about the children and Maria, and about the brave father who manages the situation so well.

Still, I say, "The Sound of Music!" as if it is something new.

My father-in-law smiles.

Am I being too obvious? Am I insulting his intelligence?

"You will be a good mother," he says.

"You will manage things very well for your child." He stops. "And then one day your child will have to manage you."

And now it is my turn to cry. I cry because he is right. I cry because I am sorry. And I cry because there he is, one more time, under the crazy, wild hair. The professor who knows everything. The professor we will all miss. ♦

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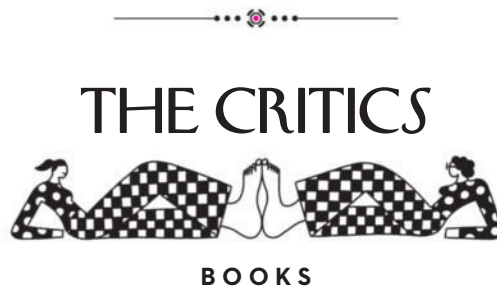
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MEN IN LOVE

Desires and designs in Alan Hollinghurst's "The Sparsholt Affair."

By Alexandra Schwartz

Bless the soul who, under the sobriquet @Lollinghurst, maintains Lines of Beauty, a Twitter account devoted to irregularly publishing sentences from Alan Hollinghurst's great novel "The Line of Beauty." When they are least expected, the gorgeous, wry phrases slip into the fountain of my feed, glinting like gold coins tossed among the pennies and the pigeon shit. Even the simplest have something to say, and to teach. "The nights sped by in unrememberable brilliance," for instance, is made by that "unrememberable," a term that implies not unmemorable dullness but a glut of indulgences. (Chief among them, as readers of the novel will know, is cocaine; another is sex, which is figured, in a different @Lollinghurst selection, as a blur of "unattributable organs and orifices at work in a spectrum of orange, pink, and purple," as if what is being described were a Mark Rothko painting rather than an orgy.) Other snippets seem pointedly germane to their new context. "He liked the noise of business and politics, it was an adult reassurance, like the chatter of parents on a night journey, meaningless, fragmentary, and consoling to the sleepy child on the back seat" so effectively conveys a mood of happy obliviousness—notice how the sentence, rotating on the axle of its commas, matches the rhythm of the car that it describes without needing to name—that it takes a moment to remember that the noise of politics has been anything but consoling of late.

Hollinghurst is routinely praised not

simply as one of the best living English novelists but as one of the best living novelists working in English. His language has a burnished, witty richness and an exacting clarity of a kind that reinvigorates the act of reading; every page has something worthy of being underlined and revisited. Recently, in *The London Review of Books*, the critic Adam Mars-Jones joked that Hollinghurst, more than any of his contemporaries, must be responsible for persuading uncouth novice novelists to abandon their craft in despair. But you could just as well argue the opposite. The poor novel, constantly asked to justify its relevance and defend its dignity under an onslaught of flashier modes of art and entertainment, seems as pleasurable and humanly true as ever in Hollinghurst's hands. For all his virtuosity, he has not pushed literature toward any formal frontiers. He is almost ostentatiously satiated by the expressive possibilities of words arranged in sentences of regular syntax, strung together until they reach the substantial but not excessive length of four hundred to four hundred and fifty pages. Essentially, he is saying that the traditional novel form has all that he needs. If that's not inspiring, what is?

The fact that Hollinghurst isn't experimental doesn't mean that he doesn't experiment. He has recently begun to use a new structure for his books, one that allows him to move more freely through time. "The Swimming-Pool Library" (1988), Hollinghurst's first novel, was largely confined to one de-

bauched summer in London (though its narrator, the sexually voracious aristocrat Will Beckwith, collects more erotic experience in those two months than other people might hope to come by in two lifetimes). By "The Line of Beauty" (2004), his fourth book, Hollinghurst was stretching his temporal canvas; the novel opens in the fizzy rush following the Conservative Party's sweep of the 1983 general election and ends, four years later, with the sour disillusionment of scandal and AIDS. But that looks modest compared with the scope of his next novel, "The Stranger's Child" (2011), which in five sections leaps from 1913 to the nineteen-twenties and on to the late sixties and the early eighties before at last depositing readers at the doorstep of our own day.

Hollinghurst's most recent novel, "The Sparsholt Affair" (Knopf), is also divided into five sections, and covers similar temporal territory, though the starting point is the Second World War, not the First. Like its predecessor, it is consumed with the past, and with the ways in which secrets buried over time are excavated and interpreted—misinterpreted, inevitably—by the well-meaning, if self-interested, present. "The Stranger's Child" concerned the legacy of Cecil Valance, who is a dashing young poet in the mold of Rupert Brooke and whose poem "Two Acres," written on the eve of England's descent into war, becomes a celebrated national ballad. In the novel's first section,



Hollinghurst's latest generation-spanning novel probes the personal and political fallout of clandestine desire.

ILLUSTRATION BY PIETER VAN EENOGE

THE NEW YORKER, MARCH 19, 2018

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Valance seduces George Sawle, a Cambridge classmate, and then Daphne, George's sister. "Two Acres" is widely believed to have been written for Daphne; Cecil, killed in battle, is canonized as a poet of patriotism and heterosexual love. Years later, a gay biographer named Paul Bryant does some revisionist sleuthing. It's the late seventies, a time when long-dead artists and writers are being yanked out of the closet to have their covert sexualities proudly reclaimed, and though Paul gets much of the Valance story right, there's much that he gets wrong, too. Here Hollinghurst's structure begins to bear fruit, as we see events, personalities, and relationships whose progress we have witnessed over decades become flattened and distorted by Paul's literal-minded determination to correct the record. "He was asking for memories, too young himself to know that memories were only memories of memories," an elderly Daphne, confronted by Paul and his tape recorder, thinks. The biographer ferrets out the facts, but the novelist shows us just how delicate and unstable they really are.

Still, there's something sympathetic about Paul's urge to find out what really happened, his taking so personally something that doesn't involve him. Writing about the past is a way

of placing oneself in a lineage defined not by blood but by affinity, that more mysterious thing. Stalking the shadow of Cecil Valance, Paul is like Nick Guest, the protagonist of "The Line of Beauty," who, working on a thesis about Henry James, feels himself to be "at the height of a youthful affair with his writer, in love with his rhythms, his ironies, and his idiosyncrasies." Like a lover, the ardent scholar works on the premise that the object of his desire exists for him alone.

Sometimes the past seeks to make itself known. In "The Swimming-Pool Library," Will Beckwith is tasked with writing the biography of Charles, Lord Nantwich, a "queer peer" whose life he saves when Nantwich suffers a heart attack in the public rest room where both men have gone cruising. Nantwich bequeaths to Will his personal history, a chronicle of his erotic life from boarding school to his years as a colonial administrator in Africa. Nantwich's exploits, marked by secrecy—"We operated on a constantly shifting code, and it was so extraordinarily moving and exciting when that spurt of recognition came, like the flare of a match!"—seem antediluvian compared with the shameless vigor of Will's own prowlings in out-and-proud London, where just about every man he meets falls like a

lamb before his wolfish appetite. Yet Will's own moment of libertinism is destined to pass into history at much the same time as Nantwich's. The novel is set in 1983; Will, with his insatiable habits, has no knowledge of AIDS, and Hollinghurst, writing five years later in the midst of the plague, gives no hint of its arrival. Only after you finish the novel do you realize that it has been narrated by a ghost.

"The Sparsholt Affair" opens in 1940. We are at Oxford, where our narrator, Freddie Green, is in his third year. He is straight, a rare qualification in Hollinghurst, and perhaps a recent development for Freddie himself; the "ingrained depravities" of boys' boarding school are mentioned with a shudder of nostalgia. Like Will Beckwith's London, Freddie Green's Oxford is a man's world in which homosexuality can seem the default state. There are alluring moments in the communal underground bathroom, where rowers and rugby players laze about in the steam, while upstairs in Freddie's rooms members of his literary club gaze in frank admiration at the superbly muscled form of a young man lifting weights in the building across the way.

Adding to this air of license is a sense that the world as a whole may not last long. The war is on; college, that "beautiful delay" of the future, may turn out to be all the future some of these boys have, and Hollinghurst wonderfully conveys the subtle, charged atmosphere of ordinary life rumbling along under extraordinary circumstances: the military drills performed in khaki in the quad while tutorials carry on above; the eerie intimacy fostered by the blackouts, when, walking between colleges or to the pubs in town, students brush up against unseen bodies in the dark.

But back to that muscled young man. He is David Sparsholt, a freshman waiting for his eighteenth birthday, when he can join the Royal Air Force. "To me there was something unyielding in his surname, a word like a machine part," Freddie says, "or a small hard sample, perhaps, of some mineral ore." His first name seems significant, too. Like Michelangelo's sculpture, David

is casually confident of the godly perfection of his body and apparently un-mindful of its effect on others. Freddie's friends are taken with Sparsholt; one, an artist, persuades him to pose in the nude and makes a chalk sketch of his torso, putting "a little slur, conventional as a fig leaf," where the genitals should be.

No one is as smitten as Evert Dax, a shy aesthete whose appreciation of the younger man has the coloring of obsession. Evert's father is a famous writer, though Evert prefers painting to literature and hopes to be an artist. Sparsholt, an engineering student, is the only child of a steel-plant manager and a department-store clerk from Warwickshire. He has none of Evert's trembling reserve or refinement. What he does have is a fiancée, Connie, a short, friendly girl with an impressive chest, who, to Evert's dismay, sometimes sneaks into David's dorm overnight.

Evert is nonetheless set on Sparsholt, and the tension between them climaxes at last in a dorm-room seduction. Freddie, having heard the triumphant story from Evert, slips into omniscient narration to relate it to us, though he politely cuts away at the crucial moment, as David enters Evert's bedroom "with the sigh of a strong man who's been called on to help, the nod of almost concealed satisfaction."

In the novel's next section, Freddie is gone, and time has shot forward. It takes a moment to grasp that it is the mid-sixties, and that David and Connie are vacationing in Cornwall with their fourteen-year-old son, Johnny, and a French teen-ager, Bastien, whose family Johnny visited the previous summer. That was a time of happy mutual experimentation, but in the past year Bastien has switched his sexual allegiance to girls, leaving Johnny in a state of confused longing. The narration is close third person, as it remains for the rest of the novel, attached here to Johnny's point of view. He doesn't seem to have much in common with David, who distinguished himself in the war and now runs a successful engineering firm, as militaristically pragmatic as ever; charged with carrying the life jackets for an afternoon of sailing he'd rather skip, Johnny thinks "with a dis-

mal sense of the slavery to tasks that was his father's ideal of a holiday." Actually, the person Johnny most resembles is Evert Dax, down to his unreciprocated desire for a more confident, masculine man and his love of drawing and architecture. In the Sparsholt family, it is the son who drags the parents away from the beach to look at beautiful old churches, not the other way around.

But Johnny doesn't always know how to interpret what he sees. He notices, neutrally, that David spends a lot of time with Clifford Haxby, a sarcastic man with an equally unpleasant wife who rents the vacation house next to the Sparsholts'. It is the bolder Bastien who senses a deeper current in the men's relationship. Stopping by the Haxby house, Bastien glimpses something through a window. When Johnny goes to look, he is met with "the unfolding ripple, the slow wink of light and shade, of the fine slats of a Venetian blind swivelled upwards and then downwards on their cord and closed." The image is cinematic, a slow fade-out that echoes the earlier glimpse of David disappearing into Evert's room at Oxford, though this time there is the uneasy sense of eyes behind the shade peering back.

Not until the novel's third section, which takes place in London in the early seventies, is the shadowy subtext confirmed. Johnny is twenty-one, done with art school and apprenticed to an art framer and restorer. By chance, he is sent to deliver a painting to a house that turns out to belong to Evert. A group of Oxford people, Freddie Green among them, have gathered for a meeting of their memoir club, and they are struck by Johnny's last name, though not for the reason we might suppose. In bits and pieces, it emerges that Evert's private Sparsholt affair has been supplanted by a very public Sparsholt Affair, a sex scandal involving David, Clifford Haxby, and a Tory member of Parliament. It seems unjust that the title of the disgrace should commemorate the private citizen rather than the politi-

cian implicated, but that must be the price of bearing such a ferocious, unforgettable name.

David Sparsholt's scandal is more than an embarrassment. Significantly, Hollinghurst sets it in 1966, the year before the passage of the Sexual Offenses Act largely decriminalized homosexuality in England. He has made use of that historic dividing line before. In "The Swimming-Pool Library," Will learns that Lord Nantwich was imprisoned during a spate of homophobic prosecution just before the act was passed, a humiliation that has scarred his life. Here Evert recalls that after he sent David a letter "of wary and perhaps rather futile support" during the crisis he was repaid with a visit from the police, who wondered just how he might be involved: "He remembered the inspector's wintry hesitation in the hall as he was leaving, as if to say he knew exactly not only what had happened then but what was happening now." Evert, who lives discreetly with another man, appreciates the irony. He has managed to slip unscathed through the traps that society has laid for men like him, while Sparsholt, the red-blooded war hero, husband, and father, has taken the fall.

The Sparsholt ignominy does not seem to attach itself to Johnny, however. His parents have divorced, but there is no suggestion that the sudden dissolution of his family has caused him particular anxiety or anguish. Stranger still, it does not seem to bother him as an openly gay man just beginning his adult life. Johnny attracts a prurient sort of attention from the men he meets in London's gay scene; the scandal makes for a morbid form of celebrity. Here, for instance, he is at a club with Tony, a handsome blond who flatters him on the dance floor before going in for the kill:

"I can't believe I'm dancing with you."

"Oh . . ." said Johnny.

"It's so cool."

Johnny shrugged, he saw what was happening.

Tony smiled at him more narrowly, pushed his right hand through Johnny's hair and said



in his ear, as if it wouldn't have struck him before, "David Sparsholt's son's gay!"

"Well, there you are . . ." said Johnny, pushing back.

"I mean, what does he say about *that*? Could be interesting!"

"I'm sure it could," said Johnny.

Then he excuses himself to go to the men's room.

It *could* be interesting, if Hollinghurst would only press the advantage of the remarkable story that he has set in motion. But we don't really find out what David Sparsholt has to say about his gay son, or what the son has to say about his father. It is almost as if Hollinghurst, sympathetic to Johnny's introverted awkwardness and wanting him to flourish on his own terms, believes the question to be impolite. As David and his cohort recede from view, Johnny becomes the novel's protagonist, though he has the provisional feel of a secondary character nudged from the wings into the spotlight. A subplot involving his unrequited attraction to a young man meanders along before petering out, and a great deal of emphasis is given to Johnny's vegetarianism, which causes him more trouble among his peers than does his sexuality. Hollinghurst has further handicapped himself by limiting Johnny's ability with words. He is dyslexic, and not much of a talker, though in place of verbal gifts he has visual ones. He becomes a portrait painter, devoting his life, as Hollinghurst has, to the difficult art of verisimilitude, while himself remaining something of a blank canvas.

And so the novel, which began in the thrilling passion of youth, gradually gives itself over to "the dense tangled stasis of adult life." Even the most static lives are punctuated by dramatic events, Johnny's very much included, but Hollinghurst develops an evasive habit of implying rather than showing them. In the novel's third section, Francesca, the spirited, beautiful daughter of aristocrats in Evert Dax's set, asks Johnny if he'll donate sperm so that she and her girlfriend can have a child. We see him briefly consider this monumental proposal. He is hardly more than a child himself; what would it mean to enter into such an unconventional arrangement, one that might limit his own newfound freedom? The question is left dangling, but the next section, set some twenty years later, opens from

the perspective of Johnny and Francesca's daughter. She is seven (though, oddly, Hollinghurst, who has written convincing children before, makes her seem much older); Johnny must have decided in his late thirties that he wanted to experience fatherhood after all. That decision is not discussed, and Francesca, a strong presence earlier in the novel, never appears again. Hollinghurst does something similar with Connie, Johnny's mother, who vanishes after the Cornwall scenes as if she had played her part and could be of no further use. The loss of these vivid, tough female characters put me in mind of Daphne Sawle's observation, in "The Stranger's Child," that women tend to be pushed to the periphery of the stories that get told about men's lives. Connie must have something to say about her husband's betrayal, which, presumably, was as crushing for her as it was for him.

This kind of determined evasiveness, frequently frustrating for the reader, feels like a new development for Hollinghurst, and I wonder if it is born of a wish to refuse the sorts of major twists and resolutions that he has relied on in the past. In a novel that conveys, with understated clarity, the devastating effects of the closet, he has chosen to resist the closet's narrative appeal, the salacious potential for revelation and revisionism that comes with uncovering the truths of an earlier time. "I'm always forgetting how sexy the past must have been," Will Beckwith says, in "The Swimming-Pool Library," and Lord Nantwich agrees:

Oh, it was unbelievably sexy—much more so than nowadays. I'm not against Gay Lib and all that, of course, William, but it has taken a lot of the fun out of it, a lot of the *frisson*. I think the 1880s must have been an ideal time, with brothels full of off-duty soldiers, and luscious young dukes chasing after barrow-boys.

In "The Sparsholt Affair," the fun and the *frisson* for which Hollinghurst is so rightly known have been dutifully faded. Like Lot, Johnny Sparsholt looks only ahead, as if fearful of what he might find, or feel, if he stopped to seriously consider what happened to his father, what came before. But considering the effects of the past is not just the responsibility of a novel about eight decades of gay history; it is the responsibility of a novel about family, and the disappointment of "The Sparsholt Affair" is that Hollinghurst lets Johnny slip the knot of his

father's life with barely a second thought, escaping easily into the safety of his own.

And yet I can see why Hollinghurst chose to focus on the relatively dull Johnny rather than delve into David. There is a note of this already in "The Stranger's Child." While Paul Bryant, the biographer, hunts for explosive secrets about Cecil Valance's short life, all the people involved in it go on living theirs. They may not interest Paul, but they do come to matter to us. An ordinary life can be as meaningful as a celebrated or notorious one, especially when its familiar trappings—marriage, children—are themselves still new to the people he is writing about. Reading "The Sparsholt Affair," I thought of a brutal moment in "The Line of Beauty," when Gerald Fedden, the Tory politician who has been hosting Nick as a lodger in his home, lashes out at him: "It's the sort of thing you read about, it's an old homo trick. You can't have a real family, so you attach yourself to someone else's." This new novel, with its numerous variations on the theme of family, "real" and otherwise, could serve as Nick's belated response. There is Evert, who became something of a father figure to Johnny; and there is Johnny himself, who ends up happily partnered, embracing the kind of tranquil domestic existence that for his father was only a front.

Or was it? Could David Sparsholt, given the chance, have imagined leading a different sort of life? Late in the novel, Johnny maneuvers a reunion between his father and Evert. They have not seen each other since their Oxford days, and Johnny is anxious to find out what they will make of each other now. He deposits David at Evert's house, and then leaves them alone together. It is yet another echo of that first demure fadeout from Evert's Oxford door, ambiguous and respectfully private, though how I wish Hollinghurst had abandoned his newfound tact and allowed us to stay there with them. When Johnny returns, he finds a domestic scene: "They were sitting just where they had been, Evert with an excited but unfocused expression, David, saying something in desultory agreement, with a look of unusual and virtuous patience." It is as if they had spent a lifetime together, though what that would have looked like we will never know. ♦

BOOKS

THE FLESH IS WILLING

Eros and escape in Li-Young Lee's "The Undressing."

By Dan Chiasson



The American poet Li-Young Lee's new book, his first in ten years, is titled "The Undressing," suggesting a public performance of privacy, staged to prolong pent-up expectations. Lee's work is often about the ways in which personal life can be understood as ceremony: his poems are nearly Eucharistic in their stately mingling of body and belief, blood and words. But the book's title also suggests that Lee's style, which tends toward solemnity, is itself "undressed"—stripped of its occasional

didacticism and mushiness by rogue hecklers and anti-muses, stationed at important crossroads in his poems, whose brutal scripts Lee himself supplied: "Who hasn't heard that! / You call yourself a poet? / You tame high-finisher of paltry blots!"

Lee's is a self-divided art. His poems often volley between speakers and states of mind. Some malarkey does get thrown into the mix: since his aims are frequently carnal, Lee's mysticism can seem, even to him, like misdirection, or perhaps mood music. And yet

he flags his own motives as few poets do. The long title poem that opens the book is a slow tango of sex and Zen, written for two voices. The woman gets all the good lines, some of them ventriloquized versions of things that Lee has said memorably elsewhere, in poems and interviews. The man, comical but also grotesque, chivalric but also clueless, embodies desires that cannot be comfortably distinguished from the wish to quiet her:

You've heard of planting lotuses in a fire,
she says.
You've heard of sifting gold from sand.

You know
perfumed flesh, in anklets, and spirit,
unadorned,
take turns at lead and follow,
one in action and repose.

I kiss her neck and behind her ear.

The woman is the searchlight of the poem, exposing its tensions between "flesh" and "spirit." The man, a pitiful animal at the mercy of his appetites (he travels due south after the neck and ear; she keeps talking), is her plaything. The game is rigged in her favor, but he's the one who rigged it, and, when the poem concludes, their voices, working now in unison, describe the riotous harmonies of a tree teeming with birds ("Blue throngs, gold multitudes, and pale congregations"). The wide angle doesn't settle the quarrel, but it does reveal the bickering as one detail in what Lee calls "the mind of God"—a much larger moral and aesthetic design that incorporates everything into its weave.

I have to be in the right mood to read Lee, whose passions do not always survive as poems. It's the same problem I have, in the less ecstatic hours, with certain poems by Rilke, one of Lee's primary influences: a poetry that attests to euphoria doesn't automatically convey it. Lee's style occasionally needs a surge protector. "The menace of the abyss will be subdued," he writes, "when I extort from you the most lovely cries / and quivering whispered pleas." He has a tendency to inflate subjective hunch into scriptural edict. Robert Frost embedded his own hoary maxims (good fences make good neighbors, and so

Lee interrogates carnal pleasures and exploits linguistic confusions.

on) in undermining contexts, or assigned them to unreliable speakers; Lee's axioms, too, come out of people's mouths, but the people sometimes seem numbed by the wisdom emanating from their moving lips:

You say:
We cannot look upon Love's face without
dying,
So we face each other to see Love's look,
And thus third-person souls
suddenly stand at gaze,
and the lover and the beloved,
second- and first-persons,
You and I, eye
to eye, are born.

The poem recalls pastoral dialogues in Virgil, or the colloquies in Yeats, like "Ego Dominus Tuus," where characters with minimal social differentiation are given philosophically distinct speeches, the not-quite-puppets of Yeats's fantastically divided mind. It's part of Lee's power that he can express ideas about all manner of elusive subjects: love and death, peace and rivalry. But as a lovers' dialogue these lines seem lifeless, as though read from a teleprompter.

The Undressing" is most potent and mysterious when you sense, behind the writ, a writer, and one whose remarkable life story could really be rendered only in poetry. Lee's great-grandfather was Yuan Shikai, the first President of the Republic of China, a controversial figure who attempted to crown himself Emperor. Lee's father, Lee Kuo Yuan, was Mao's physician, and later helped found a university in Jakarta, before being detained and tortured in Macau, including nineteen months in a leper colony. In 1964, when Lee was seven, the family arrived in the United States; they eventually settled in the Rust Belt town of Vandergrift, Pennsylvania, where Lee's father served as a Presbyterian minister. Lee had, therefore, two childhoods, as he writes in "A Hymn to Childhood": "one that didn't last," because it was disrupted by trauma, and "one that never ends," because it was redeemed by language.

Lee's father, who knew many classical Chinese poems by heart and would recite them for his children,

also required them to read aloud from the King James Bible, rewarding them with pieces of butterscotch along the way. For Lee, the acquisition of language has been tied thereafter to sensory pleasure: his early poem "Persimmons," much loved and anthologized, turns on Lee's school-aged confusion between the words "persimmons" and "precision," and the heavy traffic between what words mean and how they feel in the mouth and on the breath. This marvellous confusion of the spoken and the written, Chinese and English, meaning and mellifluousness, creates, for Lee, an astonishing vocabulary of possible "moves" for his poems on the page. When he is at his best, he pivots confidently among registers, speakers, and languages.

Lee's high-lyric idiom, "undressing" its own claims to seductiveness, investigates its sources in the fear of physical threat. According to "Persimmons," Lee also mistook, in those years, the words "fight" and "fright": the ubiquity of the second suggests, worryingly, a propensity for the first. Whatever reverence Lee felt for his father, the man was a forbidding figure whose distance was beheld at fearfully close range. Lee, who has wondered publicly about "my own violent nature" and "the nature of violent male behavior," is a searching poet of fathers and sons, alert to how domestic space warps around contemplative men and whatever latent rage their silence veils. "I don't know / what might bring peace on earth," he writes, in one of several tense and tender passages describing his father asleep:

But a man
fallen asleep at his desk while revising
a letter to his father is apple blossoms
left lying where they fell.

The stunning detail here is those apple blossoms "left lying," undetonated, like land mines, as though it were their nature to turn lethal when disturbed. "The son who comes to wake him by kissing / the crown of his head," Lee writes, "is so many things: Love succeeding. The eye of the needle." Sweetness and violence, in Lee's poems, are plotted uncomfortably close on a common axis.

The taut lyricism of Lee's work, a lyricism on tenterhooks, counteracts but cannot entirely transform a world still echoing with his father's reprimands. "Two fathers in one," he writes, in "My Sweet Accompanist," "I thought it would be forever I would sing for them." But the father who accompanies his son on accordion, happily "squeezing and pulling" it in his lap, waits "for the end of my song" to weigh in:

I don't need to hear about your categories:
Sacred/profane.
Concrete/abstract.
Self/not self.
Nature/not nature.
Past/present/future.

"Song" refers both to the remembered performance of voice and accordion and to this very song, incorporating his father's objections now as its moral accompaniment: "Where your cleverness can't reach, / there are victims in the world without a defender." Does a poem that quotes such a severe reproach endorse it, or, by folding it into an aesthetic it defies, in turn defy it?

Such questions run through Lee's many affecting poems about his life as a refugee, now part of his mind's prehistory, its episodes a hodgepodge of firsthand memories and second-hand accounts. Poems like "Our Secret Share" yield to witness, and often to the testimonial authority of prose. These poems track the fault lines in Lee's work to its historical source, but the best work here takes for granted a past of rupture and trauma, implying, beneath its placid verbal surfaces, the pain it seeks to transform.

Countless gorgeous details provide, in poem after poem, distinct delights: unless we know how costly literary beauty is to Lee's sense of fidelity to his father's values, they might seem too pretty. The plural of leaf, "leaves," is a perennial favorite of poets from Shakespeare to Whitman and Philip Larkin, a noun seemingly named for the action it embodies. (Leaves, at least in poetry, seem always to be leaving.) In "Leaving," Lee finds in the solicism of "less" for "fewer"—catnip for pedants, and familiar to anyone who has stood in a grocery-store express

lane—the inspiration for a beautiful poem about growing old:

Each day, less leaves
in the tree outside my window.
More leave, and every day
more sky. More of the far,
and every night more stars.

There is so much to admire in this little stanza. The fewer the leaves on the tree, the less there is left to leave, a construction complicated, even as it is secured, by its twin, “more leave.” The poem, tempting us to correct an ostensible error, leads us to make our own error; only when we go back and correct our correction does the poem’s subtle play of one and many, past and future, presence and absence, become clear.

In a recent interview, Lee discussed the power of common words, words whose multiplicity of uses gives them an excess of “subtleties and potentialities”:

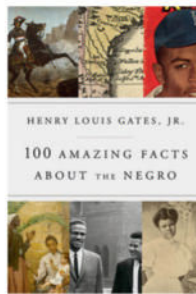
The more definitions a word has, the less defined that word is, the less definition that word secures, and, subsequently, the greater the number of possible meanings that accrue to that word, the greater the number of subtleties and potentialities that buzz about that word, and the greater the likelihood that crisis attends that word. Of course, I’m thinking in general, and about a word in isolation, and these conditions are mediated by context and use, by a word’s entering into relationship with other words.

Lee’s most ambitious poems are made from the commonest verbal stock. I had a dream while I was preparing to write this review, inspired, no doubt, by Lee’s own artfully pregnable verbal surfaces, where dream and realism, the apple blossoms and the dozing father, coöperate. I was telling a friend about a poem I’d written in which daisies spoke and revealed their sadness to me. “Why do they talk that way?” my friend asked. “The flowers?” I replied. “The poets,” he answered. It’s an ancient question, and Lee’s poems, quarrying their insights from the oldest and deepest sources, pose and answer it anew. ♦

HOW’S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT
Headline in the Boston Globe.

AS KILLINGS RISE IN CITY,
VIOLENT CRIMES SHARPLY DECLINE

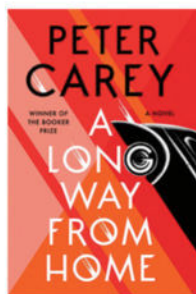
BRIEFLY NOTED



100 Amazing Facts About the Negro, by *Henry Louis Gates, Jr.* (Pantheon). This compendium takes its title from a 1957 book by the Jamaican-born American journalist and historian Joel A. Rogers, which was marketed as a black version of Robert Ripley’s “Believe It or Not!” Gates observes that Rogers occasionally embellished facts to live up to that comparison, but he also celebrates Rogers’s achievement in challenging the notions that black life was not worthy of study and that black people had made no significant contributions to history. Gates has reimagined Rogers’s book for a twenty-first-century audience. In one chapter, he describes advances in DNA technology that have determined how much African ancestry the average African-American has (73.2 per cent), and have shown that a remarkable thirty-five per cent of all African-American men have a white-male ancestor.



The Gospel of Trees, by *Apricot Irving* (Simon & Schuster). In this finely crafted memoir, Irving recalls growing up in Haiti during the nineteen-eighties as the daughter of Baptist missionaries. A series of tense, detailed vignettes capture the complexity of the time and place, and of the missionary’s role. Irving’s father, an agronomist, is convinced that reforestation is the key to lifting Haiti out of its poverty. But his “gospel” is no match for food shortages, AIDS, and the violence that follows the 1990 Presidential election. Irving moves seamlessly between the wide-eyed perspective of the child and the critical gaze of the adult, creating a tale as beautiful as it is discomfiting. The question that haunts her also haunts her book: “Should we have kept trying, even if we were doomed to fail?”



A Long Way from Home, by *Peter Carey* (Knopf). This novel is set during the 1954 Redex Trial, a motorsport contest featuring “two hundred lunatics circumnavigating the continent of Australia, more than ten thousand miles over outback roads.” We follow a trio of characters: a husband-and-wife driving team, who aim to parlay their Redex fame into a successful car dealership, and their navigator and neighbor, an unemployed teacher and former radio “quiz show king.” The pressures of the competition produce revelations about each of them, transforming a rambunctious adventure story into a potent exploration of racial identity and the brutal treatment of Australia’s indigenous peoples.



The Boat People, by *Sharon Bala* (Doubleday). Probing the dramas surrounding deportation hearings, this timely novel follows the intersection of three lives after a cargo ship arrives in Canada, carrying Tamil refugees fleeing war in Sri Lanka. A Tamil widower and father of a young child frets about how much he can reveal to authorities looking for the “model migrant.” A law student representing some of the refugees encounters the flaws of an immigration system that welcomed her family years earlier. A state official who rules on deportations is afraid of regretting any decision. “Don’t you ever worry about letting the wrong person in?” she asks a colleague. “I worry about sending the wrong person back,” he responds.

SECOND TIME AS FARCE

"The Death of Stalin."

By Anthony Lane

There is a scary moment, in "A Man for All Seasons" (1966), when Henry VIII (Robert Shaw) jumps ashore from a stately barge. His feet sink deep into the mud, up to the royal ankles. We get a closeup of the King as he looks around, jutting his ginger beard and seek-

surrounded by a small horde of henchmen from the Central Committee. First to arrive is Beria (Simon Russell Beale), Stalin's fellow-Georgian and the head of the N.K.V.D., the security service, followed by Malenkov (Jeffrey Tambor)—next in line to succeed Stalin, and

finest professional care, but regrettably most of the doctors in Moscow have been purged at Stalin's command. (This is the sort of irony in which the movie delights, and it's far from fanciful; an article in *Pravda*, that year, had indeed denounced "assassins in white coats.") The only medics still at liberty are dodderers and greenhorns; later, when Stalin's son Vasily (Rupert Friend), a barely controllable drunk, gets to the dacha and confronts them, he is incensed. "You're not even a person, you're a testicle," he shouts at one, and, at another, "You're made mostly of hair."

Vasily is too late, for his father has passed away. Not that death decreases his talent for terror. The hapless doctors are shipped off in a truck, presumably to their doom; they know too much. Stalin's look-alikes, retained as a safeguard, are now expendable. Mourners, thronging to the capital, are shot on the streets. As for the Central Committee, it seethes with plots and counter-plots. When Stalin's daughter, Svetlana (Andrea Riseborough), turns up at the dacha, Beria, Khrushchev, and the others run out of the woods, where they've been muttering in mini-factions, to press their condolences upon her. In the scrap for lamentation, everyone wants to be top dog.

If that sounds unseemly, just you wait. The dumbfounding thing about "The Death of Stalin" is that it's a comedy—the broadest and often the bloodiest of farces. It is grossly neglectful of the basic decencies, cavalier toward historical facts, and toxically tasteless. No sooner do the characters stand on ceremony than the movie pushes them off. As Stalin lies in state, his ministerial minions furtively swap positions around the open casket, with one of them exclaiming, "Jesus Christ, it's the bishops!" To be put in charge of the funeral arrangements, as Khrushchev is, means having to pick out curtains for the catafalque—ruched or non-ruched? You can feel Iannucci working his way through a list of insultables: the holy Church, the pride of the motherland, the need for grief. Not even Marshal Zhukov, the glorious veteran of the Second World War, whose stature remains untarnished today, is spared; Jason Isaacs plays him as a bully with a thick Yorkshire accent. Yet he's the only man who shows not a shiver of cowardice, and nobody else has the nerve to stand



In Armando Iannucci's film, Stalin's demise becomes material for unlikely comedy.

ing someone to blame for this indignity. His glare is as hot as a branding iron. Every lackey quails, expecting to be whipped, or worse. Then Henry laughs. The threat has passed, but, for an instant, we glimpsed both his temper and his power, and saw that they amount to the same thing. Now imagine a whole empire run along such lines. Imagine a movie where the moment never stops.

And so to "The Death of Stalin," a startling new film from Armando Iannucci. The title does not lie. Less than twenty minutes into the movie, Joseph Stalin (Adrian McLoughlin) is found lying on a rug in his dacha, outside Moscow. It is March, 1953, and breakfast is ready, but the great leader has been felled by a stroke. Steeped in urine, he is soon

dreadfully pale at the prospect—and Khrushchev (Steve Buscemi), still wearing his pajamas under his suit. Then comes the rest of the gang, including Kaganovich (Dermot Crowley), Mikoyan (Paul Whitehouse), and Bulganin (Paul Chahidi). Notable by his absence is Molotov (Michael Palin), whose wife has been arrested. His own head could be on the block.

The problem, for all concerned, is the idea of a Stalin-free land. If they must jockey for his throne, which of them will be bold enough to start the fight, with their lord and master still breathing? What will happen if, by some miracle, he rallies and learns that certain underlings presumed to step into his unfillable shoes? Meanwhile, he needs the

up to Beria. As Zhukov says, “I fooked Germany. I think I can take a flesh lump in a fookin’ waistcoat.”

Let us look at the lump. Not all the actors in Iannucci’s film are at ease with his corrosive tone. Jeffrey Tambor, for example, seems a little uncertain as to how weak and uncertain Malenkov should be, though I liked his bumbling admission “I can’t remember who’s alive and who isn’t.” On the other hand, Simon Russell Beale, as Beria, gathers the story into his clutches and deploys his entire frame; portly though he is, with a creased roll of fat at the back of his neck, there is nothing warm or comforting about Beria’s bulk. He is more beetle than bear, scuttling to and fro with a devilish purpose that Kafka would have noted, and peering at the treasonable world through rimless pince-nez, the better to anatomize its sores and flaws. To inspect is to suspect.

How did Beale, a stalwart of the British theatre who has made a mere pocketful of films, achieve this suppurating portrait of malice? I first saw him onstage in 1990, when he played Thersites—no Shakespearean role is more flecked with spleen—in “Troilus and Cressida,” and latterly, in 2014, as a choleric King Lear, sliding into the cracks of early dementia. In the intervening years, his résumé has included a generous dose of brutes and creeps: Richard III, Iago, and Malvolio, whose parting shot, “I’ll be reveng’d on the whole pack of you,” at the close of “Twelfth Night,” is echoed by Beria, in the new film, as his colleagues finally muster against him—“I have documents on all of you.”

In short, no actor has been more thor-

oughly trained in the stewing of slyness and bluster that we smell in Beria, who was as baneful a human as has ever breathed. (He was a serial rapist of young girls, but the film, thank heaven, chooses only to glance at that habit; picture someone so morally squalid that his pedophilia counts as a *sideline*.) When torture is required, he issues instructions with the relish of a gourmet ordering a meal: “Have his wife move into the next cell and start working on her until he talks. Make it noisy.” Or, “Shoot her before him, but make sure he sees it.” What the hell is there to laugh at, you may ask, in this sump of depravity? Should we be surprised that “The Death of Stalin” has been banned in Russia, where one Moscow cinema was raided and fined for screening it? Is it not, as a filmmaker there described it, “a tremendous abomination”?

Well, yes. The damnable problem, however, is that it’s funny; ten times funnier, by my reckoning, than it has any right to be, and more riddled with risk than anything that Iannucci has done before, because it dares to meet outrage with outrage. The hit TV shows that he created—first “The Thick of It,” in Britain, and then “Veep”—bristle with satirical zeal, but you do wonder, after a while, whether the everyday dysfunctions, enraging as they are, of an essentially functioning democracy are not too easy a bull’s-eye for his scorn. It’s hardly news, for instance, that the American Vice-Presidency is kind of a halfway job, and, when the worst that can befall a person is demotion, or an online roasting, how much is honestly at stake?

No such doubts attend “The Death of Stalin,” where every gag is girded with

fear. The humor is so black that it might have been pumped out of the ground. To defend the film as accurate would be fruitless; the episode that kicks it off, in which a pianist, having played a Mozart concerto on the radio, is forced to reprise it at once because Stalin desires a recording, occurred in 1944 if it occurred at all, rather than—as here—on the eve of Stalin’s demise. Yet the compression of time is allowable, because the panic and the fawning dread that are instantly triggered by his name, in these opening scenes, ring all too true. Here is a society on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

The question of how many million souls were extinguished either at Stalin’s bidding or as a result of his policies will never be settled. Documentaries can and should engage in that dispute, but no feature film, however sombre and responsible, could begin to dramatize such boundless suffering. Perhaps comedy, far from being disqualified for so unhappy a task, is the *only* genre that can tackle it. Behind “The Death of Stalin” stretches a long tradition of British grotesquerie, from James Gillray’s scabrous cartoons of Napoleon back to Christopher Marlowe’s two-part “Tamburlaine,” another litany of mass murder. As Beria pursues his sulfurous trade, you don’t know whether to weep, shriek, snigger, or look away, and what goes through your mind is not “This is exactly what happened, in 1953,” but “Yes, here is a man who could do such things. I wish I didn’t believe in him. But I do.” He is a monster for all seasons. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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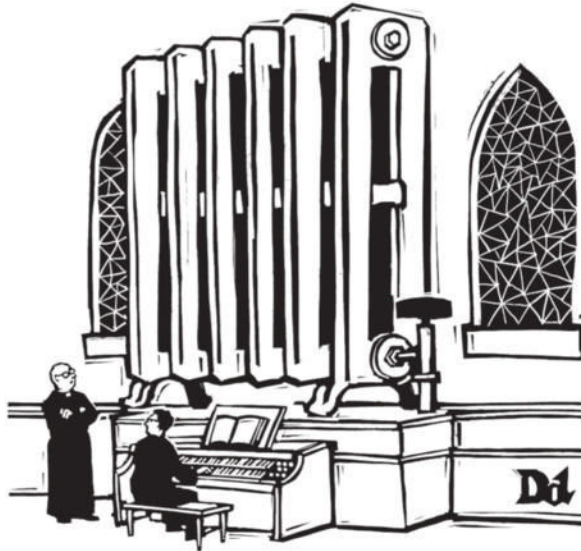
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dervavich, must be received by Sunday, March 18th. The finalists in the March 5th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 2nd issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

THE FINALISTS



“O.K., but he is going to have to check that bag.”
Bridget Fahrland, Portland, Ore.

“Yep, we're lost. We passed this guy an hour ago.”
Daniel A. Olivas, Los Angeles, Calif.

“Doesn't he know this is a non-stop flight?”
Dirk Durstein, Wilmington, Del.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“Primitive? Compared to what?”
Mort Guiney, Granville, Ohio

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THE

Our team of Harvard Medical School physicians and researchers works relentlessly...turning our discoveries into life-saving

THRILL

breakthroughs for patients everywhere. Here, we've created personalized vaccines that can shut down melanoma.

OF

And we helped develop a blood test for lung cancer patients that eliminates the need for invasive biopsies.

DEFEAT

This is the art of defeating cancer and, here, we have it down to a science.



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